

## Swaminarayan Conference Report

Frank Kaufmann  
August 6, 2013

Dear Friends

I was invited to be a key presenter at a major international conference in New Delhi, India.  
[www.scribd.com/doc/152933835/Conference-in-New-Delhi-August-2-4-2013-%E2%80%9CSahajanand-Swami-and-the-Swaminarayan-Sampraday-Historical-Social-and-Cultural-Perspectives%E2%80%9D](http://www.scribd.com/doc/152933835/Conference-in-New-Delhi-August-2-4-2013-%E2%80%9CSahajanand-Swami-and-the-Swaminarayan-Sampraday-Historical-Social-and-Cultural-Perspectives%E2%80%9D)

The hosts supported all costs for my participation, and provided for me a high level of accommodations, care, and provisions.

The host organization is called the Swaminarayan Sampraday. Swaminarayan is the name of the religion's founder, and Sampraday is the name of his organization and followers worldwide.

Swaminarayan, the founder lived from 1780 – 1831. His religion is now lead by the movement's 5th successor, Pramukh Swamiji.

The Swaminarayan Sampraday is the largest and fastest growing branch of Hinduism in the world. In 2007 it was reported to have 20 million followers. Now its membership is larger. Its members follow deep, rigorous, and strict spiritual practice, but it is a very modern community with great mastery over technology, marketing, and international and interreligious relations.

They have over 1000 major temples in the world, including massive campuses and estates throughout the US, England, and worldwide. When they opened their temple in London, they were visited by Tony Blair, the Archbishop of Canterbury, Jean Tauran of the Vatican and many world leaders.

Here are some of their temples:



*In Amnabad, the hometown of the founder*



*Hollywood, cost \$100 million)*



*North London*



*Chicago*

They have over 1000 such temples the world over, Australia, Asia and so forth.

The conference engaged over 100 scholars, both international and from universities in India.

Because the movement is deeply committed to interfaith, they invited me to be a key speaker. They wanted me to write a paper about their founder and his teachings on interfaith.

*Further Horizons for the Mission of Interfaith (Below)*



My paper was presented in the first plenary following the inaugural session.

International scholars included those Harvard, Chicago, Cal Berkeley, Oxford, the Sorbonne, Columbia University, Princeton, Toronto, and other renowned religion departments in Europe, America, India, and Africa.



Later in the conference I was summoned to meet Sampraday's top leadership. There is one supreme leader, the 5th successor to Swaminarayan, Pramukh Swamiji. I did not meet him. But I met with 8 key leaders who run the movement worldwide. We met for 40 minutes. I reported on the vision to establish an interreligious council with Security Council level status at the United Nations.

Now I am at a 16th

century Ashram with a world known Swami and Sant from the Caitanyite tradition. I will stay at this ashram, and then one evening at the ashram of a Sikh Saint before returning home Thursday. While I am here in India, I live on vegetables, grains, fruit, water, and tea. I live with the lizards in my room (friends indeed, keeping my room insect free), and the monkeys outside



Blessings and love

Frank K.

## Further Horizons for The Mission of Interfaith

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For the Swaminarayan Studies International Conference in New Delhi August 2 – 4, 2013

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### **Brief Introduction**

The life and teachings of Lord Swaminarayan are conducive to the advance of interfaith ideals. This goes without saying. The clear record of constant and impressive interfaith investment and achievements both in the life of Lord Swaminarayan and from the Sampraday is testimony enough.

The question then is not if the life and teachings of Bhagwan Swaminarayan advance the ideals of inter religious harmony, but why? What about Lord Swaminarayan, his life and teachings, and what about the Sampraday account for its leadership in this all important and desperately needed dimension of contemporary affairs?

In this paper I will examine two concerns:

1. Why is it that the Sampraday has shown itself to be an interfaith leader among world religious traditions? And
2. Are there particular elements of the interfaith enterprise that call for greater attention? Are there ways the Sampraday could intensify its interfaith effectiveness, and thus help our troubled world even more?

### **Evidence of the Sampraday's interfaith effectiveness**

The frequency, quality, tenor, range, and constancy of interfaith work from the Swaminarayan Sampraday is stellar.

Participants at interfaith meetings hosted by the Sampraday are steadily the very top leaders from the world faiths, or the top designated figures for the traditions' inter religious relations.

We can see this from the 2013 visit to the BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir by President of the Vatican's Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue, Cardinal Jean-Louis Tauran<sup>1</sup>. Or from the 2006 visit to the BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir, in Neasden by The Right Honourable Tony Blair MP, Prime Minister of the United Kingdom with his wife Mrs. Cherie Blair<sup>2</sup>.

In 2011 top leaders UK religious leaders such as Lord Archbishop of the Archdiocese of Westminster - Bishop Arnold, Lord Archbishop of Canterbury's

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<sup>1</sup><http://bit.ly/12BhzFq>

<sup>2</sup><http://bit.ly/16nxj03>

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interfaith representative Rev. RanaRana Khan, Greek Orthodox Archbishop Gregorios Of Thyateria And Great Britain, along with major leaders from Islam, Judaism, and many religions were convened by the Shree Swaminarayan Temple in Golders Green (Northwest London) to stand united in the face of growing sectarian violence<sup>3</sup>.

If one reads or listens to the discourses from the many and diverse religious figures at any of these occasions, we find lofty and eloquent tributes to the ideals of interfaith harmony, each rooted in the distinct theological and philosophical genius inherent in the respective, representative traditions of those speaking.

Top leaders from powerful religions are present, but at each of these great gatherings, the initiator and host is from one particular faith community? The Sampraday of Swaminarayan? This bears inquiry.

The Swaminarayan Sampraday, its religious leaders, and its members have always interacted constructively with leaders and members of other faiths.

### **An enduring problem in interfaith**

Until quite recently, established religious groups did not have a positive view of interfaith.

Religious leaders and believers tended to operate on the view their religion alone is correct, (or at least embodied and taught the very highest truth about reality and the human condition). They then took postures on a spectrum of behavior that naturally followed, ranging from isolationism to militant domination and forced conversion.

The change from these dystopic postures in modern times is only about 125 years old, and even now it continues to be quite slow to evolve.

One reason the change is so slow, is that most interfaith activity fails to address an essential contradiction in religion which obtains at the deepest levels; religious leaders and believers continue to imagine their religion to be most true and most correct, but the simultaneously affirm the “slightly less important” notion that it is good to embrace systems and communities that they consider to sit somewhere between errant and inferior.

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Despite this contradiction, most contemporary religious and social environments are unreservedly pro interfaith.

How has it come to be that interfaith continues to spread, becoming so enchanting and so commonly held, when the core impetus for religious intolerance is not substantially addressed?

Could racial equality for example, advance if all concerned quietly harbored the unexpressed conviction all races are inferior to mine? One properly should call that folly, yet that is the reality in the world of interfaith.

### **Types of interfaith**

Our effort truly to become one, while retaining this core contradiction and debilitating obstacle to our purposes has resulted in some of the following interfaith styles:

1. The average modern kid on the street type interfaith: I don't really believe much in religion anyway. In fact I am quite ignorant about religion. It's all more or less the same to me. I don't know what all the fuss is about. I just wish they'd all at least get along.
2. The almost hostile to religion, essentially non-believer type: I don't really care what you believe. It's beyond me anyway that any modern person can believe half that stuff. But for some reason, there still persists these odd, old fashioned types who are still religious. Since there are so many of these people, it's better for everyone that they just find a way to get along.
3. The fix social problems type: Religions tend to teach a high good that helps support a constructive social environment. Even if religion is completely false, it still is helpful to make people behave in socially constructive ways. Now if they can just find a way to stop fighting
4. We hate war types: Wars always seem to have some sort of religious element underlying the intensity of the hostilities. If we can get the religious people to to abandon their hostility and disdain for others, we will take away one of the most forceful contributing elements to the horrors and life disrupting forces of war.

A careful thinker will notice immediately that each of these bases for interfaith is void of genuine respect or any authentic surrender to the inner affirmations and self-respect and regard of the religions involved.

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In an extreme description, interfaith, as sweet, desirable, high-minded, and evolved as it is, tends to be flat out non-religious. It is only religious insofar as, by a roll of the dice, it happens to involve that odd anachronism that won't release its grip on religious believers.

But this disinterest in and ignorance of religion is not characteristic of the many who pursue religious harmony and cooperation in a serious way. Especially the top religious leaders we see attending interfaith events of the Sampraday worldwide. Many such participants are deeply religious, very knowledgeable, and in fact many of them actually help define the modern expressions of the religions they represent.

Even so, if one studies the videos, or reads the presentations from this more serious and more deeply invested community, we still find certain things that should give us pause.

One is that we witness a kind of parade of figures who use such occasions to explain how their religions in essence call for positive interfaith behavior and relations. The Rabbi, the Canon, the Swami, the Imam, all insist “our religion teaches respect for all.”

Sadly then, we are compelled to wonder (when willing to be impolitic), “Either what you say is not true, or your religion utterly fails to imbue its followers with an understanding and commitment to its own teaching.

A vast amount of the most vile, and most militant behavior on earth is perpetrated in the name of a religion. A common refrain is “Oh that's not true Hinduism, or that is not really Islam.

Well, maybe so, but the murderers are not shredding men, women, and children in the name of iPhones, the Rolling Stones, or FB Bayern Munchen.

The second thing we constantly hear at serious interfaith meetings is the phrase, “All religions teach basically the same thing.”

Again, false. All religions do not teach basically the same thing. If they did, history would not be such a pile of corpses and broken bones.

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Does the Catholic Church believe in reincarnation? Not that I am aware of.  
Does Vedanta teach Samsāra? I think so.

One or the other is the case. Either there is reincarnation or there isn't. So please let us at least speak honestly with one another. People are counting on us, looking up to us. Doesn't interfaith encourage us to talk to one another?

It is counterproductive to invest in so important, so wonderful, and so needed an enterprise as interfaith, but not be vigilant to keep the process straight, true, effective, and progressive. We just do not have the luxury to do otherwise.

### **Bhagwan Swaminarayan and the Swaminarayan Sampraday**

In light of this observation, this paper examines two things:

1. How is it that the Swaminarayan Sampraday excels in interfaith, even as compared to more powerful religions?
2. Since the Swaminarayan Sampraday is by now an established leader in this field, are there ways that it can improve, intensify, and make more effective the interfaith outcomes at which you already excel.

*What about Bhagwan Shri Sahajanand Swami, his life and his teachings cause the Sampraday and and his current successor Pramukh Swami Maharaj to excel and be so exemplary in interfaith?*

The honest answer to this question is: “It is anybody's guess.” Even so, I offer some opinions on this matter.

#### My basis for analysis

My opinions, and my analysis spring from two beliefs or assumptions in my life. The first one is:

*God is one, and in God all are one.*

This guides everything in my life, and I also use it to gauge religious claims I encounter.

When people claim to be associated with “God,” but are divisive in their orientation and behavior, I willy nilly conclude that they accidentally mistook something else for God, and in their confusion cause trouble and sadness. It

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doesn't matter if you are burning Qur'ans on a scraggly lawn in rural America, or murdering cartoonists, or selling B52s to your enemies, if the energy related to your religiousness is not deeply, humbly, sacrificially loving, understanding, and full of grace, acceptance, and embrace, then you've mistakenly devoted yourself to something other than God. That's your bad luck. And it's everybody's bad luck.

My second personal belief is this, *Religious or spiritual truth can only be communicated or transmitted by teachers who have come to embody what they seek to teach through practice.* Actually this is true for other teachers too. It is true for dance teachers, boxing trainers, and guitar instructors. The intellect is not the seat nor faculty related to truth and human transformation of capacity. The intellect does have some facility for assessing fact and logic (internal consistency), but by its nature it is not designed to relate properly to truth. Truth is known through practice. In time it can be embodied, and once embodied can be transmitted or communicated.

These two personal assumptions guide most centrally my assessment and analysis of spiritual matters, including matters related to interfaith.

### Application of my analytical rules

So turning to my first question, "How is it that the Swaminarayan Sampraday excels in interfaith, even as compared to more powerful religions?" The answer must start with this question:

Is the Sampraday in fact related to God, who is one, and in whom all are one? If the answer is yes, then it naturally and inevitably will be a harmonizing force in the world (i.e., it will bring things together), including even in horribly divided world of religion.

It is my understanding that members of the Swaminarayan Sampraday understand Bhagwan Swaminarayan to be the manifestation, incarnation, and enduring presence on earth of Narayana, Lord Krishna, the Almighty Supreme.

It that's the case, if Shri Sahajanand Swami is in fact God with us, then you need look no further for your answer. This is why the Sampraday and its leaders excel at interfaith.

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The first and most obvious reason the Sampraday is characterized by an innate reflex toward religious harmony is not to be found above all in aspects of the interfaith philosophy and efforts put forth by Shri Sahajanand Swami, but rather it is to be found in the fact that Bhagwan Swaminarayan is God, and that he devised a way to remain present in the world through the Sampraday.

True, enduring, and successful interfaith grows out of the fact that God is one, and in God all are one. Thus, regardless of how or by what means this is achieved, whoever manages to find some way to be in an intimate relationship with the true and living God, will be agents of true and lasting harmony in whatever arena to which they are called. Those involved in religion and religious organizations (as leaders of the Sampraday must inevitably be) will by nature be effective champions of interfaith.

If there are any divisions in the Sampraday, these should be managed, or else they threaten the testimony that Lord Swaminarayan is present.

\* \* \*

The next core concept that guides me when analyzing why a group is good or bad at interfaith is my view that, *“religious or spiritual truth can only be communicated or transmitted by teachers who have come to embody what they seek to teach through practice.”*

This also requires me to examine if Bhagwan Shree Swaminarayan found a way to preserve his influence, presence, and teachings beyond his mortal incarnation.

In this case we look at the more biographical, and less metaphysical side of Shri Sahajanand Swami. It has to do with *practice*. Are there are signs of “practice” that would lead Bhagwan Swaminarayan to be an effective “teacher” for interfaith.

Biographies explain that Lord Swaminarayan left home at the age of 11 for a strenuous seven-year pilgrimage through Nepal and Eastern and Southern India, ultimately settling down in the Western state of Gujarat.

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Remarkable though this might be, I would like to focus first on the months immediately prior.

Lord Swaminarayan first wanted to begin his pilgrimage earlier than 11, but instead chose to stay with his parents during the final months of their mortal lives.

“At the age of 10, Ghanshyam accompanied by His parents went for pilgrimage to Kashi (Varanasi), a holy city where many prominent scholars resided. Many great scholars respected Dharmadev in Kashi. Ghanshyam took part and excelled in many debates and discussions in Kashi with other respected scholars. He proved to the great scholars of Kashi the greatness of the philosophy of Vishistadwait and that Almighty God Supreme exists in form. Even at this tender age, the divine glory, intelligence and knowledge of Ghanshyam was all evident.

“Ghanshyam lovingly served and attended to both parents. He wanted to leave for pilgrimage at the time of the Yagnopavit ceremony, but did not for the sake of His parents. Ghanshyam’s mother, Bhaktimata, left her mortal body when He was aged 10 years and 7 months. Prior to the departure of Bhaktimata, Ghanshyam gave her spiritual and philosophical knowledge of Almighty God Supreme. This knowledge is known as Hari Gita. His father, Dharmadev, left his mortal body just seven months after the death of His mother.”

Is Lord Swaminarayan the only hero of this tender tale? Not as I read it. Dharmadev and Bhaktimata are historical paragons as parents who brought radiant glory to their divine mission as parents of the Lord. There is much to note here.

By beginning the first phases of his religious quest together with his parents, and benefiting from his father's own religious stature in its own right, Lord Swaminarayan blended the grandeur of his story with the infinite wonderment of filial piety.

By forming the origins of his religious identity in this way, Shri Sahajanand Swami showed that religiosity even of the absolute highest call is not, as so many mistakenly advance, at odds with full loving bond and immersion in family life and family love.

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This is extremely important, and would later show itself to be seminal in the way the Lord was able to remain on earth with us through the Sampraday.

Dharmadev and Bhaktimata were not at all ignorant as to who their child was. There was an annunciation given them.

Lord Krishna revealed to Dharmadev and Bhaktimata that He Himself would take birth as their Son and that peace would return to their lives. Dharmadev and Bhaktimata were overjoyed on hearing this, they then started their return journey home.

[Life and Faith of Lord Swaminarayan, Shree Swaminarayan Temple, London, 2002]

They never lost sight of this annunciation. Dharmadev, Ghanshyam's father, was a learned scholar and in the years of young Ghanshyam's miraculous mastery of the Vedas, Dharmadev was the Lord's personal tutor.

This means that Shri Sahajanand Swami's first public religious passions, his boyish excitement, his unfolding and self discovery, and his first infinite horizons of the life of a savior happened in the radiance of his father's love and pride,

At the age of 10, Ghanshyam accompanied by His parents went for pilgrimage to Kashi (Varanasi), a holy city where many prominent scholars resided. Many great scholars respected Dharmadev in Kashi.”  
[Life and Faith].

He was proud of his parents, and his parents proud of him. His birth as a public figure was in a loving, wholesome, family embrace. Not as a James Dean renegade, a Lone Ranger.

We all love when we help our Dad fix the truck, or when dad's around when we catch our first fish or kick our first goal. We are so proud and happy when mom and dad come to parents' night to hear our poem that we practiced and practiced for the big night. Why oh why is this infinite, boundless bond with mom and dad so conspicuously absent in so much of what passes for religious heroism and aspiration.

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Thus for me, a very telling part of Bhagwan Shree Swaminarayan's mortal biography that helps the Sampraday flourish as an interfaith force is that the roots of Swaminarayan's wonder are blessed and born in the fullness of normal human life, and not just into a narrow renunciatory sliver of those called to solitary life.

Later we will see how this approval and affirmation of his spiritual calling and identity from his parents proved indispensable to the sound and solid foundation of the Sampraday he forged at the end of his mortal life.

The radiant glow of Swaminarayan's consuming love for all was swaddled in the rich and loving beauty of family wrapped itself tightly around Ghanshyam as he "left home at the age of 11 for a strenuous seven-year pilgrimage through Nepal and Eastern and Southern India, ultimately settling down in the Western state of Gujarat." His pilgrimage was not fueled by an emptiness or desperation driving his extreme rigors and discipline, it was bathed in love and affirmation.

This is the second reason that the Sampraday excels at interfaith. The range and realm of learning, of knowing people, their lives, their beliefs, practices, and ways of seeking God at the roots of Swaminarayan's power as a religious figure is incredibly vast. At the tender and formative age of 11 his path brought him in intimate relations with 10s of religions, tribes, races, and peoples. Even if he were not the Lord of all, the travels of his youth could surely make of him "a man for all."

Because of his mother and father the world before him was seen in the taste of loving embrace. His pilgrimage was on a canvass of compassion extending to the widest horizons. His was an exquisite formula for an interfaith legacy indeed.

Each and every act, and all the events in the mortal life of Shri Sahajanand Swami will give the student ever more, and unique insights and additions to this tiny look at origins I have provided here. The extension of what I begin here is necessary, but such an investigation and treatment is a book-length project.

### **The Sampraday**

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Lastly I come to the all important question, could Bhagwan Shri Swaminarayan could find a way to remain fully present in the world, to persist in his divine influence and establish an enduring Sampraday that could correspond to the perfect love people experienced from him. For if the God in whom all are one can remain present in the Sampraday, then the harmonizing impact of the Lord can also remain, in everything, and in interfaith as well.

The great challenge all religions face is how to transmit across generations the substance of the founder.

Teachings alone cannot exert sufficient transformative force to rid us from evil and establish moral behavior in our lives and in society. Only the embodied Word can do so. The question is not how to preserve the “teachings” of a Master, but how to preserve the substance of the master.

In normal life, the substance of a person is passed on through blood lineage. Blood relations are the closest things to us substantially and genetically. But religions and spiritual life are not about physical and genetic inheritance, they are about the inheritance of the Tao, the way, the truth, and the life.

While Jesus was still talking to the crowd, his mother and brothers stood outside, wanting to speak to him. Someone told him, “Your mother and brothers are standing outside, wanting to speak to you.”

He replied to him, “Who is my mother, and who are my brothers?” Pointing to his disciples, he said, “Here are my mother and my brothers. For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother.”

[Matthew 12:46-50]

This challenge between the lineage of the master, and the surrendered disciples of the master has remained forever unresolved, the perennial point of clash and confusion in the religious world (as well as in other parts of human affairs).

Does the business I built with my sweat and my tears go to my lazy son, or to my friend who who built the company with me for 50 years, who laughed with me, cried with me, and held me when I was broken?

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How can this question ever be resolved? Look at the closing years and days of Lord Swaminarayan.

Lord Swaminarayan had left His family at a young age. On settling in Gujarat He had lost contact with His brothers and their families.

To regain contact, He sent Mayatitanand Swami to search for His brothers, Rampratapji and Iccharamji, in the region of Ayodhya. After searching high and low Mayatitanand Swami located and found the brothers of Lord Swaminarayan.

Rampratapji and Iccharamji came to Gujarat with their families and were reunited with their Brother, Lord Swaminarayan in Vadtal after 26 years of separation. Rampratapji, Iccharamji and their families thereafter stayed with Lord Swaminarayan.

[Life and Faith]

Family. Blood lineage.

But there also is this in the Lord's story,

Saints and satsangis could not bear the pain of seeing Lord being cremated. Dadakhachar could not bear being separated from Lord, he rushed to jump on the funeral pyre, but was held back by Gopalanand Swami who told Dadakhachar to go to the mango tree in Laxmiwadi

where Lord frequently held assemblies.

On reaching the mango tree, the spiritual form of Lord Swaminarayan embraced Dadakhachar and placed a rose garland over him and said, "Dada, do you think I have gone? No, I am ever present and will always be here."

Thus in the same sweep of perfect life, Lord Swaminarayan realizes miracle after miracle. On the one hand his brothers completely uproot their lives and the lives of their families to travel far distances so as to reunite with Shri Sahajanand Swami. This after decades of no contact whatsoever!

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And of equal measure is the other quality of bond. That of discipleship. So complete was Dadakhachar's love, that he had to be constrained from the surrender of his own life. And so complete was Dadakhachar's love for his master, that his Bhakti became the instant bridge from mortality to immortality, crossed in an instant for the very first time to comfort his disciple Dadakhachar. With that first rose Garland, the Lord stays with us until today.

In the fullness of Lord Swaminarayan's touch, the perennial clash of lineage and discipleship dissolves into the wholesome, and harmonized roots of the Sampraday.

Thus the promise of Lord Swaminarayan to remain with us, and the claim of believers that he indeed does so, is not a mere hollow declaration, this presence is fully attested to by the Sampraday carefully realized by the Lord. He does so through Acharyas, mandirs; shastras, and the sant.

We can be sure that a vital component of the Swaminarayan Sampraday is bound in great measure by his appointing Acharya Maharajshree Ayodhyaprasad Pande and Acharya Maharajshree Raghuvir Pande, as the spiritual leaders of the Nar Narayan Dev Gadi headquartered at Ahmadabad and the Laxmi Narayan Dev Gadi headquartered at Vadtal respectively.

[[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Swaminarayan\\_Sampraday](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Swaminarayan_Sampraday)]

It is my view that once again Dharmadev and Bhaktimata must be credited in important measure for the fact that Rampratapji and Iccharamji were able to respond positively to the beseeching of Mayatitanand Swami on the Lord's behalf.

Dharmadev and Bhaktimata, were deeply aware of the spiritual identity of their son, and treasured, protected, and supported him with their lives. Yet they managed to do this in such a way that the whole family could rejoice in the high calling and status of Ghanshyam. The family was not plagued by jealousy and rivalry even though it the love for Lord Swaminarayan had to be exceptional from among the children. It is obvious that Dharmadev and Bhaktimata were able to raise all their children a deep religious sensibility, such that they too could beam with pride over the special status of Ghanshyam.

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What a deep testimony to their own religious powers and discipline that even after not seeing their brother for decades after his disappearance at the age of 11, they could choose to move their whole families through an arduous journey at the request of a messenger. But not only that! They offered their own sons to their brother! These were the very sons who founded the deep and profound missions of Acharyas for the Sampraday.

### **Conclusion**

As I said earlier, the proper grasp of Bhagwan Swaminarayan's life and teachings for interfaith requires a careful study of every moment in the unfolding of Shri Sahajanand Swami's narrative.

I did not touch at all upon his all important qualities of compassion and self-diremption, nor of the subtlety of his theology and metaphysics, nor of his power to impact the spiritual experiences of those who follow him. He was at once a strict moral teacher, enabling followers to combine devotion and [dharma](#) to lead a pious life, yet simultaneously a social reformer and a servant of the real and practical needs of people. He worked to assist the poor, distribute food and drinking water, and founded and oversaw social service projects such as opening almshouses for the poor, and organizing food and water relief to people during times of drought.

His ability to integrate into a complete whole, spiritual and religious practices that usually exist only in part in most traditions testifies strongly to the clarity of the tradition, and its inevitable destiny to lead in the arena of interfaith.

This brief analysis of Bhagwan Shri Swaminarayan's life and its implications and teachings for interfaith and inter religious harmony and cooperation touched upon only the tiniest grain of the treasure trove that rightly should similarly be studied. As the Sampraday is a strong leader in interfaith, at least one serious volume on this subject is in order.

In this brief study, I touch only on his status as the incarnation of Lord Krishna, and on some the earliest and latest months and years of his biography. The entire life of God on earth in mortal form, the exquisite and nuance refinement of vishishtadvait theology, and the brilliance of his

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For the Swaminarayan Studies International Conference in New Delhi August 2 – 4, 2013

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succession and ecclesiological theory are all absent or near fully underdeveloped in my paper.

I identified elements in the life of Bhagwan Shri Swaminarayan, and the formation of the Sampraday in ways that tie both to his family, most especially to the magnificent, divine discipleship of his parents Dharmadev and Bhaktimata, and the fruits they bore not only in the Lord, but in all their children.

### **More is needed**

Though the Swaminarayan Sampraday charts masterful horizons in the arena of interfaith and harmonious inter religious relations, the truth is that our world remains wracked with horror upon horror, suffering tsunamis of war, terror, and inhumanity of near insuperable proportions, with religion implicated in so much of it.

If even the most superlative proponents of interfaith harmony struggles to stanch the roar of conflict, violence, and militancy perpetrated in the name of religion, we can do no other than to reassess our effectiveness. We cannot claim to be successful if the evidence mocks us.

If even the greatest interfaith cannot make the world a better place, then we must be ashamed. We must look in every corner and be ready to try every way possible to save our brothers and sisters from suffering.

There is a way to meet this challenge, which I show embedded in the thin thread, and faint insight seen through the life of Lord Swaminarayan and the Swaminarayan Sampraday. This is needed to lead us beyond mere success at interfaith meetings, and begin in earnest the slow climb to actually changing our world for the better by all measure, and by any measure.

The thread to which I refer is my view that the fullness of family life, and the life of unconditional spiritual devotion and renunciation are meant to be one and the same, interwoven in divine beauty and abundant, true love. This juncture is the origin point of healing and the way to realize a truly divine and peaceful society.

Lord Swaminarayan showed the ideal integration of the metaphysical infinite with the eternal animating dynamic of life and society on the mortal plane.

## Further Horizons for The Mission of Interfaith

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Families and the Kingdom of Heaven have similar characteristics. A family with true love in three generations is the basis of the Kingdom of Heaven.

The family has parents, husband and wife, children, and brothers and sisters. All these can become one through love. In this loving oneness the ideal can be realized.

When you respect conjugal love and parental love you are qualified for the Kingdom of Heaven. Grandparents pass down love to parents. Parents pass down love to husband and wife, who pass down love to children. If any of these are denied, the Kingdom of Heaven cannot be established.

[Moon, Blessed Family - p. 946]

As the Sampraday continues to radiate the presence and the love of the living Lord, and as it exerts its harmonizing embrace over religions and other institutions, the key to its chance to produce real results and substantially remove the abundant tragedy and suffering of our time, lies in the the deepest magic in Lord Swaminarayan's story, the wholeness of his divine family, the ability for God to be ever present among us.