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Swaminarayan: Dharma's Pride and Joy

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It was a cool day in London as we drove up to the magnificent temple being built with great love and devotion by the dedicated followers of the Swaminarayana Fellowship. Not knowing what to expect after accepting their generous invitation to visit while in London a few weeks ago, we were met by a group of gracious sadhus and taken on a red-carpet tour of the new bastion of India's religiousness in the heart of London town. What a sight to behold! A white-marble-and-soapstone temple three stories tall spreading out in all directions as large as a rugby field.

It was explained that the children were actively involved in the fund-raising, collecting soda pop cans by the millions to be sold toward the purchase of marble from Italy which was shipped to India for carving. The finished intricately-fashioned pillars and reliefs arrived in England to be unpacked by volunteer devotees and erected. Mothers also baked, cooked and sold their foods at every opportunity to raise funds for their remarkable twelve-million-pound temple. For two years, starting in May of 1992, helpers of all ages were involved, visiting 300,000 homes to gather one by one nearly six million cans and 22 tons of aluminum foil. We asked several why they were doing this seva with such obvious enthusiasm and they said, "Swami, it's to keep our guru happy." "Only that, to keep your guru happy?" "Yes, he has inspired us."

Sri Sri Sri Pramukh Swami Maharaj has inspired millions as the fifth in the line of successorship of the Swaminaranayan Fellowship. His humble, austere life and magnanimous heart which offers others everything, while possessing nothing himself, have made him dearly loved by a vast following of devotees worldwide, and by the over 500 swamis of his courageously strict and highly-skilled Hindu order. Swamishri oversees 350 temples in India, and 20 beyond Bharat. He was responsible for the 1985 Cultural Festival of India in London (visited by over a

million people) and the 1991 30-day exhibition in New Jersey, which again stressed Indian cultural values and arts. Yet these were small compared to the 1985 and 1992 festivals in India that drew nearly 10 million visitors each! Swamishri obviously thinks big. He also thinks small, putting great energy into the youth, training them in the traditional ways and how to live dharma in a contemporary world without succumbing.

Swamishri again triumphs in bringing the glory of Hindu India, Bharat, to England with a message of love and oneness. Yes, the temple is for everyone to come and see what India is today and was yesterday, and how, despite all efforts, the Eternal Truth or Sanatana Dharma, will live on and on as long as mankind inhabits the planet. The temple is nearing completion. As I walked through the site in late June, I could see all the commitment to detail, all the painstaking effort made by so many hands, not just the 1,100 volunteers and 1,500 craftsmen who carved the stones for the 75-foot wide sacred structure. The temple is destined to be a living monument of Indian spirituality, with its 193 pillars, its 26,000 carved stones, its massive marble staircase and lofty pinnacles, reaching 70-feet to touch the sky above Naesden.

One can no more thank Swamishri than one can thank the rain clouds for shedding their life-giving abundance on the dry earth. Still, we must make an attempt. It is time to honor this preeminent sant who has earned international recognition and has prevailed over all challenges. Thus it is that we take special joy in conferring Hinduism Today's "Hindu of the Year" award for 1995. Some might say Hindu of the century. They may well be right. Our humble plaque and grant will be presented by the Bharat Gheewala and Easan Katir families to this noble soul who has done so much in such an effortless way. All are invited to the Mandir Mahotsav inauguration to be held August 18th to 23rd. For further details contact the Swaminarayan Hindu Mission

at 54-62 Meadow Garth, London NW10 8HD or call: 0181-965-2651.