

10. NILKANTH IN VANSHIPUR

Early one morning Nilkanth sat under a banyan tree to perform his morning puja. At that time the king of Vanshipur who was out hunting, came there and saw the young Brahmachari. The resplendent face of the young tapasvi impressed the ruler as something out of the ordinary. There was an ardent seeker of liberation and in Varni he recognized at once his spiritual guide. He was overjoyed and thought to himself, "Today Narayan has 16 Nilkanth Charitra come in person to liberate me." At once he sought refuge at the young Brahmachari's feet. When Nilkanth opened his eyes he saw the king before him. He entreated Nilkanth to come to his palace and liberate him and his family. When he saw the sincerity in the ruler's request, the young celibate agreed to go with him. The king helped him sit on his royal horse, got hold of the reins and galloped to his city. On reaching his city his citizens thronged to both sides of the road to see their king leading a young Brahmachari to his palace. He received reverential salutation all along the route. Finally Nilkanth entered the darbar where the queen briskly and enthusiastically ran to receive the new guest. Everyone felt that the young Brahmachari was not an ordinary guest but God himself. The royal couple were wanting in one thing. They did not have a male heir. They had two daughters, Ila and Sushila. They too were impressed by Nilkanth's illustrious personality. From that day onwards till he left the palace, Nilkanth was served devoutly by the king, queen, and their two daughters. The princesses would arrange puja materials for the Brahmachari. Fruits, flowers and water would be brought everyday by Sushila and Ila. Nilkanth would offer it to Thakorji. He used to eat very little himself and distribute the rest as prasad. Varni would sometimes talk of his own life and sometimes about the past and the future. Everybody would listen to him with rapt attention. But the queen had some personal interest in keeping Varni in her kingdom. One day she came to Nilkanth and said, "Brahmachariji! We would like to give this kingdom to you. Along with that we would give you our daughters in marriage. Therefore give up the bother of going to the forest to do austerities." Varni laughed at the worldly inclinations displayed by the queen and said, "Mother! I have still to wander the forests and liberate souls like you. I have come here as a result of your austerities. You are very fortunate (in having me here)." The queen was greatly distressed and agitated on hearing Nilkanth in Vanshipur 17 this reply. "Brahmachari! Think carefully. You are a mere boy now. When you become a young man you will become restless without a woman? Kamdev has overcome great minds. Do you think he will leave you alone?" Varni took pity on the queen and said, "My joy lies in going to the forest and meditating on Paramatma." The queen felt as if the ground was slipping from under her feet. "Is Varni going to leave us?" was the thought that worried her most. She made one last attempt to frighten Nilkanth by vividly describing the dangers of the forest. To this Varni had a ready answer: "Mother, I am not afraid of the forest, its ferocious creatures or the

extremes of heat and cold. One should be afraid of worldly pleasures. I have come to this world to liberate people from the allurements of maya and take them to my Akshardham. I have not come to become attached to your kingdom or your daughters. However, since all of you have served me with devotion I shall grant you all Akshardham.” The veil of illusion was lifted from the queen’s mind. She went into a divine trance. Nilkanth left the room. When she awoke from the trance she was weeping. Her daughters advised her, “Mother we have in our midst a divine person who is pure and above mundane desires. Let us serve him according to his wishes. Do not be stubborn in your ways. Be insistent in keeping him within your heart and give up your mundane motives.” These words were like nectar to the queen. Then Sushila and Ila rushed to Nilkanth’s room. There they found him sitting in swastik-*asan* and in deep meditation. They had his *darshan*, came on tiptoe and made his bed. They also filled his gourd with fresh water, brought some fruits and flowers and quietly left the room. Nilkanth sat in meditation for a long time. He lost count of time. It was late night. The palace gate was closed. Varni opened his eyes and thought that he should leave the place because the royal family, out of their faith in him, would definitely be liberated. And with this resolve he left the palace in a flash. 18 Nilkanth Charitra The next morning when Sushila and Ila went to Nilkanth’s room, they found it empty. They felt that he must have left the palace. The weeping princesses rushed to their mother to convey the news. The queen could not bear the terrible news and thus collapsed on the floor. The king was informed and soon the tragic news spread to different parts of the capital and the kingdom. People thronged to the palace to verify the report. There were scenes of mourning in the palace. The king ordered horse riders to fan out in different directions to search for Nilkanth. “Don’t return without bringing the young *Brahmachari*,” was the royal edict. The mounted riders fanned out far and wide but found no trace of Nilkanth. The king himself went in search of Nilkanth but could not find any trace of him. He returned sorely distressed. Nilkanth assured the king through his uttering from the sky that he would be able to meet him later in Saurashtra.

11. ENTERS A DENSE FOREST

Nilkanth now embarked on the route to Kala Parvat in Nepal. Only a few dared to travel by that difficult route. He trekked for a month and came to an impenetrable forest in the valley of Kala Parvat. So thick was the forest that even sunlight could not penetrate the vegetation. As the young ascetic walked on the thick carpet of dried leaves snakes slithered out. Rhinos, wild buffaloes and other wild animals infested the forest. The forest was full of scorpions, snakes, spiders, etc. Even then Nilkanth walked in bare feet. Nilkanth wished to reach Pulhashram. He had been journeying for three days and nights without rest. No food

was available for four days. Nilkanth had been drained of all strength. He was so tired that he fainted and lost consciousness. On gaining consciousness, he saw a river and dragged himself there and had a bath. He bathed the Shaligram, and offered it water, fruits and flowers. Then he ate some prasada and performed sandhya vandan. Enters a Dense Forest
19 That day marked an important milestone in the Brahmachari's life. It was one year and 43 days since he had left home. The day was 29 August 1793 (Shravan vadi 8, Samvat 1850).

12. DESTRUCTION OF GHOSTS AND DELIVERANCE OF YOGIS

Nilkanth spread his mrugcharma under the shade of a large banyan tree and sat in meditation. Hanumanji had climbed upon a tree and was having the darshan of Nilkanth. When it was past midnight, terrible noises rent the atmosphere. Huge flames were seen at a distance. In a short time, fearful shapes began to approach nearer and nearer. Hanumanji sat up and became alert. When he looked around, he saw a number of ghosts coming towards the tree from all sides in a menacing manner. Some of them were short, while others were tall and tough. Some were as high as palm trees, and awfully fat. Some had long teeth while some had horns on their heads. They all had large bloodshot eyes and long nails. Screaming and shouting, the ghosts came near the tree. The king of ghosts was called Kalbhairav. He was walking ahead of them all with a sharp spear in his hand. Kalbhairav came up and shouted an order to his followers, "Come on, jump on that boy and monkey, and devour them at once!" Hanumanji got enraged on hearing this. With a roar he rushed towards the ghosts. He whirled his tail around and began to lash out at them. The jungle reverberated with screams and commotion. Some of the ghosts ran helter skelter for their lives while others ran, stumbling against one another, and hid themselves at a safe distance. Even the birds and animals of the forest were awakened by the screams and howls of the ghosts. At this, Kalbhairav became terribly angry. He rushed towards Hanumanji. Hanumanji, with a single jump, pounced on him and 20 Nilkanth Charitra winding his tail around him held him tight and hit him hard on the head with his fist. The blow was so severe that Kalbhairav's head sank into his trunk. A fountain of blood sprang forth. All the other ghosts ran away, terrified. The fight was over and all was quiet again. At daybreak Nilkanth got up, had his bath and performed his worship. Hanumanji brought some sweet fruits. Nilkanth ate a few and gave the rest to Hanumanji. He was very pleased with Hanumanji and gave him his blessings. Then he proceeded to climb the mountain. The higher he climbed, the denser the vegetation became and when he reached the top, he was in the midst of the densest part of the jungle. The growth was so thick that it was dark even at noon. In the middle of the forest, several yogis were performing austerities. When they saw Nilkanth they were greatly pleased. They thought to themselves, "God himself has

come today to give us darshan. Our austerities of many years has at last borne fruit.” Hanumanji hits Kalbhairav on his head Destruction of Ghosts and Deliverance of Yogis 21 They received Nilkanth reverentially. They cleaned a cottage for him to stay and led him to the lake for a bath. After completing his bath and worship, Nilkanth asked them, “Wild vegetation seems to be growing here; can I get some fruits to eat?” The yogis replied, “We have got an akshay patra. It gives us whatever we wish to eat at noon every day.” The yogis served Nilkanth with devotion for four days. They wished for different varieties of eatables from the akshay patra and offered them to Nilkanth. On the fifth day when Nilkanth prepared to leave, all the yogis prostrated before him and prayed, “Please bless us with your bhakti and deliver us.” Pleased with them, Nilkanth replied, “Continue your meditation for some time more. I have set out with the sole object of bestowing deliverance on all. When I reach the Navalakha mountain and liberate the nine hundred thousand yogis, you too will get your deliverance.” All the yogis were extremely pleased to hear this and bade a warm farewell to Nilkanth.

13. MEETING WITH HIMALAYA

Nilkanth passed through dense Himalayan forests in Nepal. He trekked through a valley between Dhavalgiri and Shyamgiri mountains. When he saw a torrent of water flowing through the valley he realized there was no way to proceed further. But Nilkanth was determined to go to Pulhashram. At that time Himalaya, the god of the mountains, came to Nilkanth in person, prostrated at his feet and asked, “Oh, merciful God ! Where have you come from? What is your wish? I have come for your darshan and to serve you.” Nilkanth replied, “I want to go to Pulhashram to perform austerities, but I have lost my way. Therefore, please show me the way.” Himalaya replied, “Maharaj! The only way to proceed forward is through this torrent of water flowing between these two 22 Nilkanth Charitra mountains. But the waters are infested with poisonous snakes, crocodiles and fish. I beseech you not to take this route.” Nilkanth, however, paid no heed to the words of Himalaya and plunged himself in the dangerous, turbulent waters. He walked all night against the water current and emerged from the cave early next morning. Nilkanth then proceeded on the shores of the Kali Gandki river. After trekking and overcoming many obstacles Nilkanth climbed to a height of 12,500 ft and reached the pilgrim place of Muktanath.

14. INTENSE AUSTERITIES AT PULHASHRAM

Nilkanth did the darshan of the murti of Muktanath. He selected a place at Pulhashram or Muktanath to perform austerities. Pulhashram was a secluded and an extremely beautiful place. Here, Brahma's son Pulaha had performed austerities. Himalaya shows Nilkanth the way to Pulhashram Intense Austerities at Pulhashram 23 Nilkanth Varni, though only 12 years old, began his austerities at the same spot where Bharat had performed his. The spot had since become famous as Bharatkund. It was the rainy season and the young celibate began his austerities despite lashing rains and cold winds. He held both his hands high and stood on one leg. Over his head was a large knot of matted hair. His body was thin and fair in complexion. He fixed his gaze on the tip of his nose. He was heedless of hunger and thirst, and exposed his body to the elements. The austerities went on unhindered and soon it was reflected by the emaciated body of Nilkanth. There were many yogis and munis staying in Pulhashram. They were astounded to see the severity of Nilkanth's austerities. They used to come and see him in the morning and evening but he was absorbed in austerities. The rigorous austerities exposed every bone in his body. His veins were also visible. The once tender body became emaciated. The yogis and the munis thought, "Perhaps Narayan himself has come to perform such severe austerities." Each day they came and knelt before Nilkanth and prayed, "O, God! Please bestow upon us the virtues of vairagya and austerities." Dharmadev and Bhaktimata appeared in the sky on either side of Nilkanth in their divine forms protecting him. "Oh, enough, enough dear child," they prayed. Even Brahma, Vishnu and Mahesh came for his darshan and to attend on him. Nilkanth spent 2½ months performing intense austerities and on the morning of the eleventh day of the bright half of the month of Kartik, Suryanarayan, the Sun god, appeared in human form before Nilkanth. Nilkanth happily requested him, "Kindly grant me a boon so that I may retain my vow of naishtik brahmacharya and have your darshan whenever I remember you." "So be it," said Suryanarayan and added, "O God, you are Purushottam Narayan, the supreme incarnation and the cause of all incarnations. You are pure. Who am I to bestow a boon 24 Nilkanth Charitra upon you? It is through your service, blessings and favour that I have attained such eminence and glory. And to prove that through brahmacharya one can attain a realized state you have performed these austerities. You have all the divine virtues, yet what you have asked will be fulfilled. You undertook such severe austerities so that the people on earth may learn renunciation, detachment and austere living from you." Suryanarayan appears before Nilkanth Intense Austerities at Pulhashram 25 The Sun god added humbly, "O Paramatma, it is my good fortune that you have kindly remembered me. Please do remember me whenever my services are required. I am always at your service." And so saying Suryanarayan bowed to Nilkanth and disappeared. Nilkanth Varni was happy

at successfully completing his austerities. He undertook austerities to inspire aspirants to liberation. Varni then, with emaciated body and resplendent form, crossed high lands and dense jungles, and took the route to Pokhra.

15. MOHANDAS MEETS NILKANTH

As Nilkanth was walking at a brisk pace through dense forests a sadhu called Mohandas saw him. He was greatly impressed by Varni's personality. He experienced bliss while in the presence of the young celibate. He was convinced Nilkanth had extraordinary spiritual powers. He bowed at the feet of Nilkanth and asked, "Brahmachari! I have lost my way while trekking through the Himalayan foot hills. But at this young age why are you roaming through this difficult terrain?" Mohandas asked. "I am wandering to show the way to the likes of you who are lost," replied Varni. The sadhu was convinced that Varni would show him the true path and decided to stay with him. The young Brahmachari permitted him to stay. He realized that the sadhu was eager to discover his true self but his mind was attracted to worldly things. Someone had presented Nilkanth with an attractive kamandal. Mohandas took a fancy for that. Though he did not want it, his mind remained fixed on it even while doing the darshan of Nilkanth. While walking they came to a river. It had stones of all sizes covered with moss. Mohandas warned Varni, "Be careful while stepping over the stones. If you slip the kamandal will break." Nilkanth was really surprised at the concern of the sadhu for a 26 Nilkanth Charitra mere kamandal. On reaching the opposite bank, Nilkanth dashed the kamandal against a boulder and broke it. "What have you done? You have broken a beautiful kamandal," Mohandas cried out. Nilkanth replied, "Instead of concentrating on God you have become attached with this mundane thing. Then how will you get liberated from this world?" A reformed Mohandas touched Varni's feet. A few days later they came across a tall tree from which violet mango-like fruits had fallen on the ground. Nilkanth started eating one. Mohandas, too, took one to eat it. "Don't eat the fruits, they are poisonous," Varni warned him. "If you eat them you will die." Mohandas threw away the fruit. Soon four bawas came. On seeing Nilkanth eating the fruit the bawas plucked some. Varni told Mohandas, "Tell them not to eat the fruits." Mohandas told them that they were poisonous and they would die if they ate them. "But why is the Brahmachari eating them?" the bawas questioned sternly. "Because he is a great person," Mohandas replied. "We too are great," boasted the bawas. And so out of arrogance they ate the fruits and died. Several years later while Mohandas was on a pilgrimage to Dwarka he met Bhagwan Swaminarayan in Saurashtra. He took the saffron diksha from the Shriji Maharaj and was named Vrajanand Swami