

Chapter 4

Addicted to Seva and Satsang

Just as people are enchanted by the beauty of a rainbow's hues, similarly, the sadhus and *parshads* of Junagadh were captivated by the multitude of saintly virtues they witnessed in Jhina Bhagat. Since Jhina Bhagat possessed a natural *atmabuddhi* with all devotees of God, spiritual progress came naturally to him. Of his own accord, Jhina Bhagat accepted the life of a servant, which is very difficult to practice in an ideal sense. Just as a *jholiya* dove plummets from a great height, putting complete faith in its owner, Jhina Bhagat had dedicated his body entirely in the service of sadhus and devotees.²

Around this time, Krishnacharandas Swami and his group of sadhus were assigned to stay in Gondal. In Gondal was the cremation site of Aksharbrahma Gunatitanand Swami. Thus, it was as if every grain of that sacred soil came to life to proclaim the auspicious and illustrious

divine glory of Akshar Purushottam. For one who had transcendent reverence for all places of pilgrimage that had been touched by the holy feet of Shriji Maharaj, how much joy must he have experienced to do the darshan of the holy cremation place of Shriji Maharaj's Akshardham, Gunatitanand Swami! One can only imagine the veneration that Jhinabhai held for that sacred place of pilgrimage sanctified by Aksharbrahma!

As Jhinabhai did darshan of Akshar Deri, many beautiful images of Maharaj and Swami crossed his mind. As if this place had been calling out to him, upon his arrival, he fell into a meditative state remembering Gunatitanand Swami. As he walked along the trail on this land, pockmarked with hollows and hillocks and scattered with shrubs and small trees, it was as if he could hear a divine voice reverberating from the sacred Akshar Deri telling him, "Stay here. This is your home." There was a special place in Jhina Bhagat's

heart for the divine Akshar Deri—as if his very life force were centered here!

After arriving in Gondal, with guru Krishnacharandas Swami’s permission, Jhina Bhagat had set a routine to visit Akshar Deri for darshan every morning and evening. The mere darshan of this sacred place brought Jhina Bhagat boundless joy. When Jhina Bhagat would arrive at Akshar Deri every morning and evening, he would go for a bath in the sacred Gondali River, after which he would do *pradakshinas* of Akshar Deri. Then, he would do *dandvats* to Mandan Bhakta, who resided at Akshar Deri. Mandan Bhakta had met Shriji Maharaj, so Jhina Bhagat relished the opportunity to sit with him and hear incidents from Shriji Maharaj’s life. Then, on the way back to the mandir, Jhina Bhagat would talk about Gunatitanand Swami with his companion sadhus. The mahant of Gondal mandir, Shastri Dharmatanaydas Swami had also met Gunatitanand Swami and understood his glory. All of these *sadgurus* and sadhus would pray

and do *pradakshinas* at Akshar Deri, and their prayers would be fulfilled.

As people experienced Jhina Bhagat's lofty sentiments of service, his loving heart, his affectionate behavior, and his other distinctive virtues, the impact of his saintliness began to spread far and wide. Krishnacharandas Swami had overseen the construction of a *hari mandir* in the village of Sardhar, in which Jhina Bhagat had offered exemplary service. Those who had seen the small, tender-bodied Jhina Bhagat dig the foundations, lift stones, prepare mortar, and heft buckets of dirt and mortar onto his head never failed to be uplifted by the constant joyous smile that overflowed from his heart onto his face. To Jhina Bhagat, this wasn't hard work or hardship, but his singular devotion to Bhagwan Swaminarayan. The bliss of that devotion was forever visible on his face.

Krishnacharandas Swami would routinely teach his disciples about the dharma of *seva* by explaining, "A Swaminarayan sadhu's motto, or guiding principle, should be to do *seva*."

Moreover, Krishnacharandas Swami would wake up his sadhu-disciples every day before dawn and instruct them to sit in the lotus position and meditate on Bhagwan Swaminarayan.

There was in Krishnacharandas Swami's *mandal* an elderly and disabled sadhu named Dharmajivandas Swami, who had faith in *Akshar Purushottam upasana*. Krishnacharandas Swami assigned Jhina Bhagat to serve him, which he did with great love. Jhina Bhagat would help him bathe, lay out his puja, feed him, prepare his bedding, and massage his feet. By offering such service with tact and humility, Jhina Bhagat earned the inner blessings of Dharmajivandas Swami. In his conversations with Krishnacharandas Swami, Dharmajivandas Swami often praised Jhina Bhagat's humble devotion.

The *parshads* who stayed in Junagadh mandir were responsible for performing a variety of mandir services, including sweeping the assembly hall and courtyard, cleaning the

stables, taking the mandir cattle out to pasture, harvesting hay for the cattle, collecting *datan* (special twigs for brushing teeth), making leaf bowls and plates, drawing water from the well, washing utensils, cleaning the dining hall, grinding grains, and resurfacing the dirt floors. The *parshads* would happily and faithfully engage in all these service activities to please the *sadgurus* of Junagadh. Jhina Bhagat would go with a companion *parshad* to take the mandir's cattle to pasture and, on his way back in the evening, would cut 400 *datans* for the mandir's sadhus, *parshads*, and devotees. Moreover, in addition to his assigned responsibilities, he had also taken upon himself the task of cleaning the stables and making cow dung patties for fuel every morning. He served with absolute dedication for six months and pleased guru Krishnacharandas Swami.

A single thought remained foremost in the minds of both Balmukunddas Swami, the mahant of Junagadh mandir, and Krishnacharandas Swami, and that was—how

to foster the growth of Satsang? Thus, they spent most of their time traveling through the villages and nurturing the *satsangis* there. Krishnacharandas Swami would often keep Jhina Bhagat in his service during his travels. Untroubled by the cold, the heat, or the monsoon rains, Jhina Bhagat remained engaged in service and devotion. In the bone-chilling cold of the month of Posh (December–January), Jhina Bhagat would take his morning bath in the icy cold water from clay pots that had been chilled outside overnight. As soon as their *mandal* entered a new village, Jhina Bhagat would immediately clean the mandir assembly hall and courtyard and wash all the latrines and urinals. After lunch, he would wash all the utensils. In his free time, he would memorize Swamini Vato and passages from the Bhaktachintamani. During his travels as a *parshad* with Krishnacharandas Swami, he memorized the entire third chapter of the Swamini Vato and a number of chapters of the Bhaktachintamani.

When Krishnacharandas Swami would ask him to address the evening assembly, he would speak with great enthusiasm, captivating the audience of sadhus and devotees. Jhina Bhagat had also memorized many kirtans, which he would sing while swaying with devotion. To hear Jhina Bhagat's kirtans was a special, divine treat. Furthermore, Krishnacharandas Swami was always very pleased when Jhina Bhagat would sing Nishkulanand Swami's verse, "*Sāche sāchu kaheshu, Hari rākhe tem raheshu re...*" (We will tell you the unvarnished truth; that we will remain as God wills...). Jhina Bhagat would regularly sing this kirtan to please his guru.

For two months in the peak summer heat, at Krishnacharandas Swami's behest, Jhina Bhagat would sit next to Balmukunddas Swami when he went to bed and slowly swing a hand fan to help him stay cool. In those two months, Balmukunddas Swami had discerned the great virtue of this young devotee.

In early 1909 (V.S. 1965), Krishnacharandas Swami's *mandal* had been assigned to travel to the village of Samadhiyala near Rajkot. The Darbar of Samadhiyala had promised to send his bullock cart to fetch the sadhus. So, the sadhus and Rajarambhai were waiting for it to arrive next to the Trikoniyu garden outside Kothariya Avenue.

As per Bhagwan Swaminarayan's command in the Shikshapatri, Jhina Bhagat would never waste any time but remained constantly engaged in devotion. He was very conscientious about this point. So, while everyone waited for the bullock cart to arrive, Jhina Bhagat began to recite Swamini Vatos and kirtans that he had memorized, and the atmosphere became suffused with devotion. The sadhus who were waiting there and the devotees who had come to see Krishnacharan Swami off forgot about the surroundings and circumstance and became engrossed in Jhina Bhagat's words. Krishnacharandas Swami was spellbound by

this young *parshad's* recitation, and he began to sway from side to side.

An hour and a half later, the bullock cart finally arrived, and the divine trance was broken as everyone began to exclaim, “Wow, Jhina Bhagat! Wonderful!”

In Vachanamrut Gadhada II 25, Maharaj explains the essence of ideal *seva* saying, “Just as Uka Khachar has become addicted to serving the *sadhus*, in the same way, if one becomes addicted to serving God and His Sant to the extent that one would not be able to stay for even a moment without serving them, then all of the impure desires in one’s *antahkaran* will be destroyed.”

The essence of this Vachanamrut had been completely interwoven into Jhina Bhagat’s life.

Every day he was in Junagadh, Jhina Bhagat would do *dandvats* to Krishnasevadas Swami, Tyagvallabhdas Swami, Narancharandas Swami, and the other *sadgurus* at their respective seats. In serving everyone, Jhina

Bhagat experienced the bliss of serving and offering devotion to Bhagwan Swaminarayan. The Ramcharitmanas describes the ideal practice of *seva* as extremely difficult when it says, “*Sevā dharma kathin jag janā*” (The world knows that living the ideals of service is difficult). However, the ideal practice of *seva* came very easily to Jhina Bhagat, who remained constantly immersed in service. Witnessing his enthusiasm and unwavering dedication to service and devotion, Krishnacharandas Swami had declared in the Junagadh assembly, “Jhina Bhagat has the virtues to become a great *sadguru* in the future. We must commend his service and devotion!”

2 In medieval India, a type of minstrel would travel around the land showcasing a dove that had been trained to fly high into the air and plummet like a stone to certain death only to be caught by its owner in an outstretched cloth bag, or *jholi*, just before it hit the ground. People marveled at the dove’s absolute surrender and faith that its owner would catch it before it hit the ground, and the term *jholiya pareva*, or “cloth-bag dove” became a metaphor describing a person with absolute trust and surrender in one’s superior without any regard for oneself.