

Chapter 9

First Panchtirthi

After the Dangara mandir was completed, Vignandas Swami's *mandal* was to go to Rajkot to begin the construction of a mandir on Kadiya Street. However, before that, Vignandas Swami, Yogi Maharaj, three sadhus of their *mandal*, and Shambu Bhagat and his father, Devji Bapa, set out on a pilgrimage of the holy Panchtirthi of Sorath².

After traveling through Jetpur, Dhoraji, Faneni, Varjang Jaliya, Ganod, Manavadar, Meghpur, Piplana, and Akha, the *sant mandal* arrived in Balagam. Vignandas Swami's former brothers, Naranbhai and Purushottambhai, were delighted to see Yogi Maharaj.

At 4 p.m., Yogi Maharaj went for darshan in the mandir in Kumbhar Vada which had been sanctified by Ramanand Swami and Shriji Maharaj. At the mandir, Yogi Maharaj delivered spiritual discourses and pleased all

the Kumbhar devotees. Yogi Maharaj spoke at length about the two Kumbhar devotees from Balagam who had become sadhus in Shriji Maharaj's time.

The following day, the sadhus took two bullock carts to Panchala. After doing darshan in the Panchala mandir, they visited the village chieftain's home. The Darbar welcomed the sadhus, performed their puja, and offered them a small donation. When Bhagwan Swaminarayan had celebrated the Fuldol festival in Panchala, he had gifted his sanctified apparel to Jhinabhai. The Darbar brought out these holy relics, and the sadhus did darshan. Then, the sadhus did darshan of the room from which Shriji Maharaj had delivered the discourses recorded in the Panchala section of the Vachanamrut.

From here, the plan was to go to Keshod and take a train to Gondal. Thus, Vignandas Swami told the devotees, "Ready the bullock carts."

Vejabhai Koli replied, "Swami, due to heavy rains, the bullock cart will become mired in

mud.” So instead, Purushottambhai brought two horses for the sadhus.

Yogi Maharaj adamantly refused to ride a horse and said, “I will walk.” But how could these affectionate devotees let the sadhus walk when the entire area was waterlogged? Thus, everyone insisted that the sadhus ride horses, but Yogi Maharaj would not relent. Even Vignandas Swami urged Yogi Maharaj to ride the horse. Finally, Shambu Bhagat physically lifted Yogi Maharaj and sat him upon the horse. In the face of such love from the devotees, Yogi Maharaj had to accede to their wishes.

Shambhu Bhagat grasped the reins of both horses and led them forward. Everyone else walked behind them. Keshod was ten miles from Panchala, yet they reached on time. Although the entire route was waterlogged, and portions were extremely muddy, the sadhus completed their Panchtirthi despite the difficulties.

From Keshod, they boarded the train and reached Gondal station at 2:30 a.m. In those

days, the railway station was where the municipal offices are today. Thus, the sadhus walked north along the railroad tracks until they reached the main road to Akshar Deri. When they reached Akshar Deri, all the sadhus were so happy to do darshan, they felt the fatigue of their travels fade away. They bathed in the Gondali River, did their puja at Akshar Deri, and then did *dandvats* and *pradakshinas*.

Then, they sent word of their arrival to a blacksmith devotee who stayed in the town. When he heard that Vignandas Swami and Yogi Maharaj had arrived, he came to Akshar Deri early in the morning with *sukhadi* and *ukalo*. Yogi Maharaj offered the *thal* at Akshar Deri and served all the sadhus and devotees. Then, they broke open a coconut and distributed the prasad to everyone. From here, all the sadhus took the train to Rajkot.

At that time, Shastriji Maharaj was in Dangara. Due to heavy rains, the rivers were flooded. Dayaljibhai arrived from Rajkot with a letter from Yogi Maharaj in which he had

requested Shastriji Maharaj, “Please come to Rajkot.”

As soon as he read Yogi Maharaj’s letter, Shastriji Maharaj began preparing to leave for Rajkot. Pujaji Bapu and the other devotees suggested, “Why don’t you go tomorrow.”

Shastriji Maharaj replied, “Now, I cannot stay here for a single minute longer. Jogi is calling me!”

Just then, Vakhatsinhji Bapu arrived on horseback from Jayva for Shastriji Maharaj’s darshan. He did *dandvats* and bowed to Shastriji Maharaj. Shastriji Maharaj immediately told him, “Prepare your horse. I want to go to Rajkot.”

Due to the rains, the entire route was extremely muddy and flooded in places. Shastriji Maharaj sat atop one horse while Pujaji Bapu sat atop another. The rest of the sadhus and devotees walked behind them until they reached Hadmatiya Station. From there, Shastriji Maharaj took the train to Rajkot.

Despite the difficulties in travel, the fact that Shastriji Maharaj was drawn to Rajkot due to one word from Yogi Maharaj was a testament to Yogi Maharaj's extraordinary devotion to his guru!

2 Panchtirthi of Sorath is a pilgrimage to five holy places in the Sorath region that were sanctified by Bhagwan Swaminarayan.