

Chapter 9

The Festival of Sharad Punam at Akshar Deri

This year, Shastriji Maharaj, Nirgundas Swami, Yogi Maharaj, and other sadhus and devotees resolved to celebrate Sharad Punam with great festivity at Akshar Deri in Gondal. Although work on Akshar Mandir had yet to begin, Shastriji Maharaj had insisted that every year devotees with faith in Akshar Purushottam *upasana* from around Gujarat and especially from the region of Jhalavad, should travel to Akshar Deri in large numbers to celebrate Sharad Punam, the birth anniversary of Gunatitanand Swami.

So, devotees from Mojidad, Chachana, Kanthariya, Adval, along with devotees from Wakaner-Gariya would take the train to Rajkot, where they would arrive on the evening of Ashadh *sud* 14 and spend the night at the mandir on Kadiya Street.

This year, Yogi Maharaj stayed in the Kadiya Street mandir to look after the devotees. He woke up at 3 a.m., completed his bath and puja, and began preparing food with provisions he had kept ready from the night before. By 8 a.m., he had prepared *rotla* for 50 to 60 devotees. After offering *thal* to Thakorji, he fed the sadhus and devotees and ate only after they had finished.

Then, they caught the 9 a.m. train from Rajkot and reached Gondal on the morning of the full moon day. In the evening, everyone celebrated the Sharad Punam festival in Shastriji Maharaj's presence with great enthusiasm. They enjoyed many spiritual discourses that evening. Finally, at midnight, the prasad of sweetened *dudh-powa* (rice pudding) was distributed to everyone, and the devotees dispersed.

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When Yogi Maharaj stayed in the mandir on Kadiya Street in Rajkot, he would often take a

companion sadhu and Shivabhai and beg for alms around the city.

Yogi Maharaj primarily went to the homes of Morarji Maganji Sheth, Madhavjibhai Tank, and Chhaganbhai Dhanesvar. When he arrived at their home, he would sing kirtans and recite Swamini Vato. Thus, the devotees and their entire families would become very pleased. When Yogi Maharaj arrived at their house, the women of the family would drop all their housework and gather in an adjacent room where they could listen to Yogi Maharaj's melodious kirtans and hear his discourses. They would prepare ample quantities of grains, ghee, gur, and other provisions for Yogi Maharaj to take with him.