

Chapter 15

The Passing to Akshardham of the Propagator of Akshar

As the date of the *murti-pratishtha* ceremony in Gadhada was fast approaching, everyone was certain that no untoward event would occur. Shastriji Maharaj had also gradually changed his disposition and showed higher spirits so that, thinking that his health was on the mend, the constant flow of devotees to Sarangpur would ebb, and they would instead join in *seva* in Gadhada.

As soon as the crowds of devotees left, Shastriji Maharaj suddenly changed his disposition again and stopped taking any food or water. His breathing became shallow and labored. Instantly, his condition became critical. The sky filled with dark clouds. The sound of strong winds whistling through the cracks increased the overall sense of foreboding. Dreading some ominous fate,

everyone began to fervently chant the Swaminarayan mantra. Suddenly, Shastriji Maharaj opened his eyes and asked, “Is the *pratishtha* in Gadhada complete?”

Motibhai replied, “Yes, Swami! The *pratishtha* is complete.” An expression of divine contentment briefly flickered across Shastriji Maharaj’s luminous countenance before the atmosphere reverted to its former melancholy state.

In the morning, Shastriji Maharaj expressed a wish to go to the Rang Mandap, on the ground floor of the mandir. The sadhus took him there and helped him recline onto a cot. His attendants realized, “These are the final moments. This is our last darshan. At any second, Shastriji Maharaj will be leaving us.”

Everyone’s hearts were filled with a singular prayer, “Swami! Please stay amongst us still!” But they were helpless.

Telegrams were dispatched regarding Swamishri’s critical state. Everyone’s

confidence that Swamishri would stay with them until the *pratishtha* proved unfounded. It appeared that he had wanted to give the credit for that supreme victory of *upasana* to his beloved Yogi Maharaj. Thus, no one had the power to prevent what he willed from happening.

Suddenly, the entire Rang Mandap was filled with divine light. Everyone looked around in astonishment. Thus, having diverted everyone's attention, on 10 May 1951 (Vaishakh *sud* 4, V.S. 2007) at exactly 10:57 a.m., Swamishri said "Swami-Maharaj" with his final breath and left his body of his own accord and took his place in Akshardham.

The entire Satsang community felt as if they had been struck by lightning. Everyone became numb as they tried to endure the unspeakable tragedy that felt like the fires of final dissolution.

Instantly, a message was sent to Yogi Maharaj in Mumbai. He was so devastated that

he instantly developed a severe case of diarrhea.

To reach Sarangpur as fast as possible, they chartered a plane from Mumbai to Bhavnagar. Yogi Maharaj, his accompanying sadhus, Nandaji, Champakbhai Sheth, Vasantray Pandya, Chhaganbhai, Harshadbhai Dave, Nanubhai Dave, and others flew to Bhavnagar and then drove to Sarangpur.

Shastriji Maharaj's body was seated in a palanquin below a neem tree in the mandir courtyard. An impenetrable shadow of grief lay heavily over the assembled sadhus and devotees. Everyone was constantly chanting the Swaminarayan *dhun*.