

Chapter 23

Pilgrimage in Sorath

On 14 October 1954, (Aso *vad* 3, V.S. 2010), Swamishri and a group of sadhus traveled to Manavadar.

After doing darshan in the mandir, Swamishri went to Chhaganbhai's house to have darshan of his collection of Bhagwan Swaminarayan's holy relics. These included the yellow *dhoti* Maharaj had worn during the Jetalpur *yagna*, the upper garment Ramanand Swami had draped over Maharaj upon appointing him as his successor, a wooden board Maharaj had used as backing when writing letters, Gunatitanand Swami's *dhotiyas*, and other similar sanctified objects.

Swamishri requested a pot of filtered water. He dipped small portions of the relics into the water, then distributed a little bit of this sanctified water for everyone to drink and sprinkled some upon everyone's heads. Then,

he filled the remaining sanctified water into twelve bottles and gave them to devotees and youths from Gondal, Rajkot, Atladara, Vadodara, Ahmedabad, Dharmaj, Zarola, Bhadran, Bhilada, Mumbai, and other places to take home and share with their local *mandals*. Then, Swamishri went to Lakshmi Vadi and other sanctified spots in the village.

Swamishri relished the opportunity to have darshan and grant others darshan of these old, sanctified locations and sacred relics. He would enthusiastically encourage youths and devotees to come for such darshan. He would get everyone together in each sanctified spot and ensure that no one would be left without having darshan. If he noticed anyone missing, he would seek them out and call them close. He would have someone read aloud the inscription at the sanctified spot from start to finish. Although he would hear the same inscription each time he visited, it never got old for him but it always seemed fresh every time. On such occasions, everyone witnessed the

extraordinary faith and bhakti that was part of Swamishri's being. Even if he knew the entire history of the pilgrimage spots, he would still have the entire inscription read aloud. He would tell the youths who were coming to this place for the first time to record the words of the inscription in their notebooks. Swamishri would then do *dandvats*, chant the *dhun*, make auspicious resolutions, offer prayers, and distribute prasad to everyone present. He would thus give everyone otherworldly memories. He would become so emotional that it seemed as if in those sanctified spots, he were witnessing Bhagwan Swaminarayan walking around in the flesh.

Two days later, Swamishri traveled by bullock cart from Manavadar to Piplana for the darshan. Mumbai's wealthy Fatnani Sheth had great affection for Swamishri. He had come all the way from Mumbai to Meghpur Station and then walked four miles to have Swamishri's darshan in Piplana. From here, Swamishri and the entire group went to Akha. These group

pilgrimages were divine. Swamishri would be sitting in a bullock cart, and youths would be walking on all sides of Swamishri's bullock cart. One youth would be sitting in the front of the bullock cart to hold an umbrella over Swamishri to provide him with some shade and protect him from the afternoon sun. The youths would be singing kirtans in chorus or reciting the Swamini Vatos from memory as they walked. As soon as they would finish singing one kirtan, Swamishri would gesture for them to start another. That darshan and those memories became everlasting.

On the way back from Akha, everyone bathed in the sanctified Ozat River. All the youths and devotees crowded around Swamishri in the river. Everyone was extremely eager to have Swamishri cup a handful of river water and pour it over their head. People would scramble for the opportunity to receive an *abhishek* of sanctified water from Swamishri's sacred hands. These moments granted

everyone the experience of spiritual fulfillment and indescribable bliss.

Then, after having darshan of all the sanctified spots in Piplana, Swamishri left by bullock cart at 6 p.m. and reached Manavadar at 2 a.m. Thereafter, Swamishri went to Kalyanjibhai's house in Junagadh. He went for darshan to every sanctified spot around the city. From here, Swamishri went to Gondal. The youths and devotees traveling with Swamishri experienced limitless bliss throughout this pilgrimage.

Around this time, Swamishri's elder brother, the great devotee, Kamalshibhai, and his younger brother, Chhaganbhai, informed the Satsang community after meticulous research that Yogiji Maharaj was actually born on Vaishakh *vad* 12, V.S. 1948. Accordingly, all the *satsang mandals* were informed that, henceforth, they should celebrate Swamishri's birthday on this actual, verified day.

Every year, a festive atmosphere reigned in Gondal in the period between Sharad Punam

and Annakut. Although the experience of festive joy was an everyday occurrence in Swamishri's presence, thousands of devotees would flock to Gondal to celebrate Diwali. They would arrive to an academy of satsang and *seva*. The festival enthusiast Swamishri would be spreading his joy in all directions as he made his rounds around the mandir.

Lakshmi Puja and Chopda Puja would occur in Akshar Deri. Devotees from Gondal, Rajkot, and places far and wide would make sure to arrive in time for the puja with their account books. The account books would be arranged before Akshar Deri. At the auspicious time, Swamishri would arrive in Akshar Deri wearing his *pagh*. With Vedic rituals, he would offer puja to the account books. Then, wishing that everyone may progress in their business and occupation, that the economy and rains may be good, that everyone may be happy in the upcoming year, and with countless such good wishes, Swamishri would bless everyone present. Not only that, but Swamishri would

personally sign each account book in red ink. The process of personally signing every single account book would take at least one and a half to two hours. But Swamishri would happily spend this time to please the devotees. The devotees would be overjoyed to receive Swamishri's personal signature and blessings for their business or occupation. They would feel reassured that the upcoming year would go spectacularly well and that they would prosper.

Like every year, today, Swamishri prepared to go to Rajkot. Wearing his *pagh*, Swamishri walked towards the pujari's room next to the neem tree under which the youths were washing utensils. He expressed his delight to see the youths engaged in *seva*. Then, he picked up a dish. Upon closer examination, he found it to be still slightly greasy. He instantly said, "You can't wash dishes like this. Thakorji eats from here."

"Bapa! These are dishes for devotees," said one youth.

“Thakorji is not present in them? Residing within the devotees, Maharaj and Swami eat. So, you must wash the dishes so that they are spick-and-span. See, like this...” With those words, still with his *pagh* on his head, a shawl draped over his shoulder, and shoes on, Swamishri squatted on the wet ground. While the youths exclaimed, “No, no... Swami, please leave it...” Swamishri scrubbed and washed three dirty bowls! Swamishri’s actions were so rapid, and yet resulted in such meticulous spotlessness, that all of the youths were astounded.

Swamishri provided lessons in service not just through his talks but also through his actions.

After a bit, Swamishri washed his hands and departed for Rajkot.

After the Annakut celebration, Swamishri would personally travel to the surrounding villages to distribute the Annakut prasad. Baskets of prasad would be hoisted atop a small car, while Swamishri, Balmukund Swami, a

parshad, Daji Bapu, a youth, and a driver would all pack in. With the commencement of the month of Kartik, the cold would have started. Yet, early in the morning chill, before the first light, Swamishri would walk to a river or creek on the village outskirts for his bath. Then, after completing his puja and breakfast, Swamishri would sit in the village's *hari mandir*. Throughout the morning, he would send youths and devotees to every house in the village, where they would distribute a saucerful of prasad. After lunch, Swamishri would travel to the next village, where he would reach by evening. Sometimes, Swamishri would request old newsprint to have folded into small packages to hold the prasad. He would join everyone in this task, folding the packages of prasad with great speed. Then, he would have each folded package tied shut with a bit of twine. During the evening *arti*, the village children would gather in the mandir. He would have them all sit down and lead them in singing the *dhun*, “*Swāmi ane Nārāyan, Akshar ane*

Purushottam, ātmā ane Paramātmā, Brahma ane Parabrahma.” Then, he would distribute the Annakut prasād to each child. In this way, within four or five days, Swamishri would travel through the surrounding ten to twelve villages before returning to Gondal. Then, on Ekadashi, Swamishri would travel to Ahmedabad.

This year, Swamishri first went to Ghoghavadar. Every time he visited Ghoghavadar, he would invariably go for darshan at the shrine of Shivji on the riverbank. Sitting at the shrine, Gunatitanand Swami had expounded on the five Vachanamruts to become *brahmarup*. So, whenever Swamishri visited this sanctified place, he would spend time at the shrine of Shivji. He would also often bathe in the adjacent river.

On this occasion, Swamishri had gone to the fields to use the toilet. However, before he reached, very far away from him, a woman had walked by. So, Swamishri suddenly returned and, with a frightened expression, breathlessly

said, “No one is paying attention! There are women coming close!” Then, Swamishri went back to the fields to use the toilet and have a bath before he returned to his accommodations.

What vigilance in following the minutest of God’s commands!

From there, Swamishri traveled to Ramod, Movaiya, Devchadi, Shivrajgadh, and Mandva before returning to Gondal. Replenishing the supply of prasad, Swamishri again set out, traveling to Ganod, Upleta, Varjang Jaliya, and Dhoraji before again returning to Gondal.

This year, for their Diwali vacation, many youths had come to Gondal from Mumbai, Anand, Dharmaj, Karamsad, Veersad, Zarola, and other villages. Swamishri made sure that everyone got the benefit of both *seva* and *samagam*. Early in the morning at 4 a.m., and late at night after 11 p.m., Swamishri would gather the youths and sit with them, sharing his experiences and engaging in spiritual discussions. He would individually look after

each youth and make them happy. Each youth would feel that Swamishri is truly pleased with me. Swamishri possessed the extraordinary art and power of granting bliss to each person according to their capacity. Understanding each individual's particular psyche, Swamishri had the unique ability to please each person in every way. No matter who came to Swamishri from anywhere on Earth, it would be impossible for him to leave without a smiling heart. Swamishri had an inexhaustible store of love that he would serve to each and every person until their vessels were overflowing.