

Chapter 20

Zeal for Service Undeterred by Kitchen Smoke

From Gondal, Swamishri traveled to Ramod. Swamishri usually referred to Ramod as a “*gokuliyu gaam*.” Mohanbhai, Bhurabhai, Mulu Bapa, Vela Bapa, Premjibhai Mistry, Naranbhai Vadand, Tapubhai Kotval, and other devotees of Ramod were extremely affectionate, accommodating, and straightforward by nature. Mohanbhai, in particular, had a very friendly relationship with Swamishri. Swamishri used to call him to help with preparations before every festival held in Gondal.

Since Swamishri had come to his village, Mohanbhai sponsored a feast of laddus. Many devotees were going to partake in the feast. Matam Swami began to cook the meal while Swamishri delivered spiritual discourses to the devotees.

The kitchen was poorly ventilated, and the firewood was green, so the kitchen quickly filled with smoke. Matam Swami's eyes began to burn, and finally, out of frustration, he dropped everything where it was, climbed into the loft, and went to sleep. A short while later, Swamishri concluded his spiritual discourses. When Swamishri went to the kitchen, he found the cooking fire burning, but Matam Swami was nowhere to be seen! Finally, he found Matam Swami asleep in the loft with a blanket over his head. When Swamishri asked what was wrong, he replied, "I don't want to cook. There is too much smoke."

Swamishri affectionately said, "But we have to offer Thakorji *thal* on time. What about that?"

Matam Swami angrily said, "If you want to offer *thal*, you make the food. I don't want to go back into that kitchen."

Swamishri went down into the kitchen, grided up his loins, washed his hands and feet, and began preparing the meal. In no time, he

had prepared laddus, dal, rice, *shak*, and other items.

Mohanbhai came to check on the food. When he saw Swamishri making it, he asked, “Where is Matam Swami?”

Swamishri’s eyes had become bloodshot due to the heavy smoke. However, Swamishri laughed and said, “Today, after a long time, I got the opportunity to make Thakorji’s *thal*. Matam Swami is very kind, and lovingly gave me this opportunity to serve.”

Mohanbhai had a lot of affection for Matam Swami, so he went into the loft and shook him awake. Before Mohanbhai could say anything, Matam Swami declared, “I don’t want to choke on that smoke.”

Mohanbhai gently rebuked him, “Jogi Maharaj has inhaled a lot of smoke, but you didn’t come to help him. Preparing the meals is your responsibility.”

But, Yogiji Maharaj had prepared the food, offered the *thal* to Thakorji, and made

arrangements for the devotees' meal. After feeding the devotees, Swamishri lovingly served Matam Swami.

At 4 p.m., Swamishri offered Thakorji sugarcane pieces. After distributing the sugarcane as prasad, Swamishri also had a couple of pieces. Mohanbhai told Swamishri, "Bapa, you had to suffer so much smoke today. If we can complete the upper floor, then it will bring a permanent resolution to this problem."

Swamishri laughed and gave Mohanbhai the handful of sugarcane pieces he had been eating. Then he asked, "How many pieces are there?"

Mohanbhai counted them and said, "Seven." Swamishri gave him a meaningful look.

Mohanbhai didn't understand what Swamishri was trying to say, but when exactly seven years later, an expansive upper floor was completed, he remembered the pieces of sugarcane that Swamishri had given him. And so, for Mohanbhai and his family, the seven pieces of sugarcane and the seven years to

complete the upper floor became a treasured part of their family lore.

In October 1953, Swamishri traveled with the youths from Ramod to Thanadevadi. The Darbar of Thanadevadi had immense affection for Swamishri. Swamishri arrived at Thanadevadi in the evening, and the Darbar welcomed him warmly. The Darbar brought out a sword sanctified by Shriji Maharaj that so Swamishri could have darshan. Although it was a sanctified sword, when the Darbar Saheb handed it to Swamishri, Swamishri pulled his hands back. Then, he gingerly touched it and touched his hands to his eyes out of reverence, but thinking that “a sword does not befit a sadhu’s hands,” he did not hold it.