

Chapter 16

The Odyssey of Akshar

The *patotsav* of the Gondal mandir was celebrated each year on Vaishakh *sud* 10, the same day as the Gadhada *murti-pratishtha*. However, once the Gadhada *murti-pratishtha* had been scheduled for this auspicious day, Shastriji Maharaj had instructed that this year, “The celebration in Gondal should be done on Vaishakh *sud* 13.” Swamishri had made prior arrangements in Gondal accordingly. The Gondal *patotsav* celebration was announced during the Gadhada *murti-pratishtha* assembly, and all were invited to attend. Devotees from all over Gujarat and Africa were eager to take part in the celebration in Gondal.

In their grief at Shastriji Maharaj’s passing, all the devotees were yearning to see Shastriji Maharaj within Swamishri and, through him, experience the bliss of Shastriji Maharaj’s

presence. In this situation, who could let such an opportunity pass them by!

Thus, thousands of devotees traveled to Gondal with Swamishri via special train. Early on the morning of Vaishakh *sud* 13, the devotees witnessed Swamishri, renowned as the great Sage of Akshar Deri, performing *mahapuja* in Akshar Deri. Offering puja to and performing *abhishek* of the *murtis*, Swamishri completed the *patotsav* ceremony around 9 a.m. Then, Swamishri, accompanied by about 2,000 devotees, walked through the streets of the town singing bhajans on their way to the old, sanctified Swaminarayan mandir for darshan. The devotees walked in the procession, singing *dhun* and bhajans with devotional abandon. Under the leadership of the Gunatit Sant, this trek of the Gunatit family was a pilgrimage with Akshar. The devotion and sense of duty of these valiant devotees of Gunatit *jnan* were remarkable. It was as if they were pledging to Shastriji Maharaj, “Oh Swami! Following Yogiji Maharaj’s command, we will

forever tread the path you have shown us. We will ensure the victory peals of true *upasana* reverberate in all directions.”

During the evening assembly, Maganbhai and Harmanbhai, the prominent devotees of Africa, extolled the glory of devotion to the guru. The flow of devotees coming to Gondal from Gadhada continued unbroken. Swamishri welcomed countless devotees to his beloved Gondal mandir and offered their hearts solace. As he viewed and treated everyone, great and small, as divine, everyone experienced an unparalleled comfort in Swamishri’s presence. Everyone’s hearts were lightened of their heavy burdens of grief.

On the twelfth and thirteenth days after Shastriji Maharaj’s passing, Swamishri ceremoniously concluded the series of traditional post-funerary spiritual discourses and headed to central Gujarat.

Until now, Swamishri had stayed with Shastriji Maharaj, following him like a shadow everywhere he went. Today, embodying

Shastriji Maharaj in every pore, he took his place at the helm of the Gunatit family and set out to raise the clarion call of Akshar Purushottam. To propagate the faith in Akshar and Purushottam, to fulfill the devotees' devotional desires, to grant everyone the bliss of Maharaj's *murti*, Swamishri headed out on the path tread by Shastriji Maharaj, leaving a natural fragrance of devotional service in his wake.