

Chapter 3

Prembhakti Jene Ghat Bhāvi (Possessed of Loving Devotion)

Soon after this, the *murti* of Hanumanji was installed in the mandir. Due to Virjibapa's infirmity, Mohanbhai shouldered the responsibility of serving the *murtis* in the mandir. However, he was also frequently ill, and consequently, was unable to serve Thakorji properly.

Mohanbhai was searching for someone whose life was suffused with devotion and who would assume the responsibility of serving the *murtis*. He found just such a person in Jhinabhai. When he asked Jhinabhai to take on this responsibility, Jhinabhai was overjoyed. For some time now, Jhinabhai had lost interest in his studies. Consequently, while he had been coming first in his class every year, he completed sixth grade ranked seventh in his class.

Jhinabhai embraced the responsibility of serving the *murtis* in the mandir with the boundless intensity with which a river meets the sea. Doing darshan of the beautiful *murti* of Swaminarayan Bhagwan, Jhinabhai offered incense, *diva*, and *arti* with great devotion and faith. He planted flowers in the mandir's courtyard and flowering vines on the compound walls and watered them with water he drew from the well. When the flowers blossomed, he would pick them and weave distinctive new garlands every day to adorn Thakorji's *murti*. Just as Meera never tired of doting on her *murti* of Giridhar, so, too, did Jhinabhai remain constantly engaged in devotional service believing Bhagwan Swaminarayan to be present in the *murti*. He would sing the lengthy *thal*, *Avināshi āvo re, jamvā Krishna Hari*, composed by Premanand Swami, while offering meals to God's *murti*. These devotional activities became his daily routine.

The great sadhus of the Swaminarayan Sampradaya inspired the inner life of this child devotee. The *mandals* of various *sadgurus* would regularly come to Dhari and deliver enlightening discourses. Once, a group of sadhus who had come to collect the tithe had brought Jaga Bhakta Swami with them to Dhari. Five-year-old Jhinabhai had come to the mandir holding his grandfather Virjibhai's hand, and this great soul and vessel of Gunatitanand Swami's grace had placed his holy hand on young Jhinabhai's head. Krishnacharandas Swami regularly came to Dhari and enlightened the townspeople with the spiritual wisdom he had learned from Gunatitanand Swami.

Jhinabhai's family had been in Satsang for generations. Thus, together with his mother, father, and older brothers, Jhinabhai conscientiously upheld Maharaj's commands in the Shikshapatri and observed Ekadashi, Janmashtami, Harinavmi, and other fasts and festivals. Jhinabhai would happily walk with his

elders to Kunkavav on their way to Junagadh for the large festival celebrated every year on Jeth *sud* Ekadashi (Bhim Ekadashi). He would show no signs of tiring. From Kunkavav, they would board the train and travel to Junagadh.

Chapter 3

The Child Devotee's Divine Enchantment

Jhinabhai's distant paternal aunt, Manekba, was a staunch *satsangi* who lived in Kunkavav. She resembled Jhinabhai in both appearance and temperament. Seeing the pure devotion to God overflowing from Jhinabhai's heart, she began to love him like a son. While immersed in worldly life, she remained firm in her observance of *niyams* and fasts. Her husband, Jadavjibhai, was also spiritually inclined. He would offer service in the mandir with great devotion and was known as the 'light' of Kunkavav. His older brother, Sundarji Gila, owned a cotton gin in Kunkavav.

Sometimes, on his way to Junagadh, Jhinabhai would stop at Jadavjibhai's house. Manekba would be delighted to witness the purity and conscientiousness of Jhinabhai's every action. When Jhinabhai went for a bath,

he would first wash the wooden stool with water and then sit on it to bathe. Before every action, he would say, “Swaminarayan!” Marveling at how such a small child could live a life of such spiritual profundity, Manekba would feel a sense of divinity illuminating her heart with the conviction that Jhinabhai was a spiritually enlightened soul. Manekba would plead with Jhinabhai to stay longer, but he would head off to Junagadh to participate in the festival there.