

Chapter 19

Sabarkantha's First Experience of Brahman

Pramukh Swami, Mota Swami, Sant Swami, Muni Swami, and a total of eleven sadhus, together with Naranji Maharaj, Ramchandra Thakar, Khengarjibhai, Purushottamdas, Vinayakrav, Babubhai Kothari, and a total of twenty-five devotees were accompanying Swamishri to Himmatnagar. They boarded the train in Ahmedabad on the afternoon of Friday, 23 January 1953 (Maha *sud* 9) and reached Himmatnagar by evening.

Chunibhai Soni, Bhikhabhai, Vitthalbhai, and other devotees welcomed Swamishri at Himmatnagar Station. That night, Swamishri and the sadhus held an assembly and delighted the devotees with spiritual discourses and kirtans.

The following afternoon Swamishri and his group reached Idar by train. A bus that had

been specially arranged by government officials took them from the station to the mandir. The small *shikharbaddha* mandir looked beautiful set amidst the greenery at the base of a small hill. The mandir's mahant welcomed everyone. Swamishri did Thakorji's darshan, had lunch, and visited the devotees' homes in the village. At 3 p.m., they left for the village of Torda.

Near Torda is a beautiful ancient mandir dedicated to Shamalaji. Set in hilly terrain at the source of the Meshvo River, this pilgrimage site's head welcomed Swamishri and described the connection between this Shamalaji *murti* and Khushal Bhatt (Gopalanand Swami). He showed Swamishri the mandir's old archives in which this history is documented, and he narrated how the Shamalaji *murti* would go to play with Khushal Bhatt in Torda. There was a divine friendship between the two. Swamishri and the sadhus were very pleased to see the historical evidence of this incident. Swamishri made many auspicious wishes and chanted the Swaminarayan *dhun* for their fruition. The

beautiful *murti* of Shamalaji appeared even happier today as this pilgrimage spot was further sanctified by the holy presence of the Gunatit Sant.

Arrangements had been made for the sadhus and devotees to travel from Idar to Shamalaji in station wagons. Everyone was ready to go when Swamishri told Shantibhai, "Since you are with your family, come to Shamalaji by bus. We will wait for you there before traveling to Torda." As Shantibhai was familiar with this region, he was making the arrangements for Swamishri and the sadhus.

Traveling with Shantibhai were his wife and Rameshbhai Dalal's wife. Shantibhai argued that he should travel with Swamishri, explaining, "We will be able to come with you in the station wagon. I will sit with my family in the last seat, whereas you will sit next to the driver in the front, so..."

"We can't do that!" Swamishri interjected. Shantibhai was unaware of how strictly Swamishri observed the vows of a sadhu. So, he

once again countered, “Bapa! What if we tie a curtain, and my family sits behind it?”

“That just won’t work,” said Swamishri with conviction. “We cannot allow that to happen. Follow our command. Get to Shamalaji by bus. Have lunch there. Then we will go to Torda.”

Reluctantly, Shantibhai and his family went to Shamalaji by bus as instructed. However, by the time they reached Shamalaji, Swamishri had already left. On that cold, dark winter night, exhausted by the bumpy ride on the bus, Shantibhai’s first thought was how would they reach Torda as Swamishri had already left?

He went to the mandir, where the pujari affectionately welcomed him. The pujari said, “First have darshan, and then we have a hot meal ready for you. Swami Bapa has personally requested me to feed you a hot meal.”

As everyone ate, the pujari continued to praise Swamishri and sing his glory in one way or another. Shantibhai was still concerned about how to reach Torda. Moreover, he

couldn't help but be surprised, thinking, "What kind of spell has Swamishri cast upon this pujari that his enthusiasm on meeting Swamishri earlier today has still not dissipated!"

Everyone went to bed. Soon, everyone was fast asleep. Suddenly, someone knocked on the door. When Shantibhai opened the door, he was surprised to see the driver of Swamishri's station wagon. The driver said, "Come on! Swami Bapa has sent me to pick you up!"

Shantibhai wondered, "He sent this huge station wagon for just three passengers?"

Shantibhai woke the rest of his family, and everyone set out for Torda. Soon, Shantibhai realized that the driver was in the same state as the pujari! "Yogi Bapa is Yogi Bapa!" The driver must have said these words at least twenty-five times during the hour's ride. The transformation of strangers into friends was a natural consequence of Swamishri's loving affection. Even a brief interaction would leave a person lost in Swamishri's divine personality.

When Shantibhai reached Torda, it was midnight. Swamishri had eaten dinner and was listening to Gopalanand Swami's descendent, Ravishankar Thakar, narrate Kushal Bhatt's childhood incidents as recorded in their old handwritten manuscripts. Nandaji and the other devotees were seated around Swamishri.

Shantibhai did *dandvats*. Swamishri affectionately called him near and said, "You have arrived safely? We were just waiting for you, thinking that we could go to sleep once you arrive!"

Shantibhai felt his entire being tingling with sweetness as if he had just been immersed in a pool of kindness. "Just to receive such love and affection, one would need to be a worthy vessel," he thought. "And yet, Swamishri continues to shower his love indiscriminately, regardless of whether one is worthy or not."

Shantibhai mentally asked for forgiveness for perceiving *manushyabhav* in Swamishri.

At 4 a.m. on Ekadashi, Swamishri spoke about many important points. The essence of his talk was, “One should maintain affection for all *satsangis*. Understand the greatness of the smallest *satsangi*. Everyone should strive to increase Satsang. Even greater than donating hundreds of thousands of rupees is to implicitly follow the Satpurush’s words, as that earns the Satpurush’s immense favor.”

In the morning, Swamishri went for darshan at Gopal Ashram, which had been built on Khushal Bhatt’s birthplace. Ravishankarbhai gifted Swamishri Khushal Bhatt’s sanctified wooden shoes. Then Swamishri went for darshan at the shrine of Achaleshwar Mahadev, where Kushal Bhatt used to do dhyan.

By 1 p.m., everyone arrived in Idar. From here, they boarded the train to Prantij. Chunibhai Soni and about 100 devotees, young and old, had gathered at Himmatnagar train station for Swamishri’s darshan. They insisted that Swamishri disembark from the train and led him to a waiting room at the station, where

everyone offered *dhotiyas* and donations and did the puja of Swamishri and the sadhus. Finally, at the request of the new, enthusiastic devotee from Ahmedabad, Shantibhai Shah, Swamishri reached Prantij.

Swamishri's accommodations were in the mandir, where the Brahmachari Maharaj had made good arrangements. In the evening, Swamishri visited Shantibhai's home. In the evening assembly, the sadhus sang kirtans, Naranji Maharaj narrated divine incidents of Maharaj and Swami, and Swamishri delighted everyone by delivering discourses on *sankhya* and the glory of the Sant. The following day, on their way to Ahmedabad, Swamishri did darshan at a shrine of Hanumanji and took the express train to Rajkot in the evening.

While he had been at the holy site of Torda, Swamishri had written an letter of blessings to all devotees. He had expressed his wish that the Gadhpur mandir may be completed quickly and that Maharaj may grant happiness to and fulfill all the wishes of those contributing to it.

Moreover, he had blessed everyone, “May the garden of Gunatit knowledge continue to blossom. May the devotees imbibe the Vachanamrut and Swamini Vato, and remaining absorbed in that knowledge, may they experience bliss. I have firmly wished that the manifest abode of Akshar Deri may fulfill everyone’s auspicious wishes.” Moreover, in the letter, he had entreated everyone to subscribe to the Swaminarayan Prakash, writing, “I have written this letter from the birthplace of Sadguru Gopalanand Swami. Thus, we will be victorious, victorious, and victorious. The victory bells will sound throughout the universe. 25 January 1953, Torda, V.S. 2009, Maha *sud* 11, Sunday, 9:30.”

The details of *tithi*, date, day, time, and place were all very important to Swamishri’s mind. Whether in writing a letter, making a note, or even in conversation, he would invariably note the above details like a historian. If there were any important holy days or observances linked to the *tithi* or day, he would definitely note

them. Helping people understand the importance of place and time, Swamishri would note it down and give everyone a distinctive memory of the letter. He was inspiring everyone to remember their times with him and view them as precious as treasure because these divine memories were a devotee's invaluable tool for traveling on the path to Brahman.

Swamishri continued to travel day and night through Gujarat and Saurashtra, granting thousands of devotees the various joys of satsang and the delights of spiritual discourses without the slightest regard for his health. From Rajkot, Swamishri traveled to Porbandar, Vadiya, Gondal, Botad, Sarangpur, Gadhada, Ahmedabad, Porda, Anand, Ajmavat Kot, Kanbha, Dholka, Sarangpur, Kariyani, Gadhada, Atladara, and Dabhoi before arriving in Anand.