

# Chapter 3

## The Mandir Is My Home

Jayshankar Master, Harishankar Dave, Mayarambhai, and the other school teachers saw Jhinabhai as a brilliant and kindhearted student. The virtues embedded in Jhinabhai's life that distinguished him from all others were gradually emerging into public view, like a thousand-petaled lotus slowly blossoming.

Mohankaka used to do puja of Thakorji and otherwise take care of the Swaminarayan mandir in Dhari. From a young age, Jhinabhai would assist him in Thakorji's service. Jhinabhai spent most of his time outside of school in the mandir. Most days, he would sleep in the mandir at night, often convincing a handful of his young friends, including Durgashankar Popat, Jadavji, Mavji, and others, to join him by telling them, "Whoever studies in the Swaminarayan mandir would never fail their exams."

Jhinabhai would wake up at four in the morning, take a bath, do puja, and then wake up his friends. After they got ready, he would sit them down to study. After *arti*, he would teach them how to do *dandvats* and lead them in chanting *dhun*. While the other children would soon be bored of these bhakti rituals, Jhinabhai would never tire of them. After school, Jhinabhai would always make it back to the mandir for *sandhya arti*. In this way, school and mandir were the two favorite places of Jhinabhai's childhood.

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## An Honest Student

One day, Chandulal Madhavlal Vanik was teaching history to Jhinabhai's class. If a student came to class without preparing his lessons, Chandulal would have him bend over and hold his toes as punishment. Such punishments were common in that era. That day in class, Durlabhji Karsanji, Mathurdas Sundarji, Vallabhdas Damodar, Durgashankar Bhatt, Chandu, and other students had answered his question incorrectly, so Chandulal had them all line up and bend over while holding onto their toes. When he posed the question to Jhinabhai, Jhinabhai answered correctly to his delight.

Chandulal would often walk around the classroom with a cane quivering menacingly in his hand. Anyone who stood up or otherwise misbehaved would receive a swift smack on the wrist. Sometimes, if a student gave an incorrect

answer, Chandulal would have the student hold onto their earlobes and do squats.

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When Jhinabhai was in fifth grade, a boy named Chandu was in his class. One day, the school's headmaster, Tribhovandas, grabbed Chandu's arm and hurled him violently to the floor, seriously injuring him. The kindhearted Jhinabhai could not bear seeing others punished, and this scene of unprovoked violence brought tears to his eyes. Jhinabhai began to chant, "Swaminarayan, Swaminarayan..." The other children were so scared by the sight of Chandu motionless on the ground they scampered away. Due to extreme blunt force trauma, Chandu soon died. Chandu's parents lodged a complaint with the local government officials, who launched an investigation. Although the officials would question potential witnesses, which of the pupils would dare point the finger of blame at the school's hot-tempered headmaster?

The ever-honest Jhinabhai could not tolerate being party to duplicity. With unwavering honesty and without fear of the headmaster's retaliation, Jhinabhai respectfully told the investigating officer, "The headmaster had hit Chandu for no reason." Jhinabhai's fearlessness gave the other children the courage to corroborate the truth that Jhinabhai had spoken. The firm conviction in Jhinabhai's voice, coupled with the *tilak-chandlo* on his forehead, convinced the investigating officer that this religious and honest young boy was telling the truth. The investigating officer fired Tribhovandas from his job as headmaster and rewarded Jhinabhai's honesty with a small token of appreciation.

A similar incident happened again in the same class. Jagdishbhai Bhagwandas Parekh was a very stern teacher. Once, during a geography lesson, he began to ask the students questions, one after another. When Durlabhji gave the wrong answer, as per the custom of the time, Jagdishbhai had him hold out his

hand to smack it with a ruler. Just as Jagdishbhai was bringing the ruler down, Durlabhji flinched, and the ruler grazed his eye. Durlabhji yelped in agony as his eye turned red. Durlabhji's suffering pained Jhinabhai, and he began to chant “Swaminarayan, Swaminarayan.”

Soon, Durlabhji's paternal uncle, businessman Purushottam Sunderji, heard of the incident and rushed to the school demanding answers. But who would speak up? After class, Purushottam Sunderji approached Jhinabhai in the nearby alley with the banyan tree and asked him what had happened. Jhinabhai honestly relayed what had transpired. “Durlabhji made a mistake. He didn't know the answer and attempted to escape his punishment by pulling back from the ruler at the last second, and thus was accidentally hit in the eye.”

Jhinabhai's honest answer convinced Purushottam Sunderji not to pursue any further action against the teacher.

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Jhinabhai was an outstanding student, and he consistently ranked first in his class. Consequently, several lazy students would demand that he share his answers with them during exams. Jhinabhai would chuckle and affectionately say, “Oh, sure. Why not! I will tell you all the answers. I will hold my slate at such an angle that you will be able to see my answers.”

But, when the time came, Jhinabhai would solve the problem on his slate and immediately turn it over. The dishonest students would demand, “What is the answer?” But, Jhinabhai would remain silent. Some of the students would threaten the mild-mannered Jhinabhai with violence if he did not reveal his answers. Jhinabhai would reply, “Answer the question yourself! If you copy, and my answer is wrong, yours will be wrong as well.”

When other students found ways to distract the teacher and copy other students’ answers, Jhinabhai would disapprove. He believed that

such cheating was tantamount to cheating God, who resided within each person's *atma*.

When Jhinabhai entered sixth grade, headmaster Naranbhai Umedbhai would often remark while teaching the class, “There is no need for me even to test Jhina. He is so brilliant! He correctly solves every problem using the correct method. You all, on the other hand, make so many mistakes! You should really try to be more like him.” Thus, he never tired of praising Jhinabhai.

Motibhai Master was a very stern teacher, but he had a deep affection for Jhinabhai. Motibhai would have each student recite their lessons in class. If a student made a mistake in their recitation, he would punish them by hitting them with a switch from a date palm. After class, Jhinabhai would encourage his classmates, “Let's go and prepare our lesson properly; otherwise, Motibhai will flay us!”

Thus, Jhinabhai possessed a natural inclination for studies and worship. He did not have much interest in games, but

Durgashankar, Popat, Raysang, and his other friends would often insist on taking him to play *kho kho*. On Fridays, the schoolchildren would go on a picnic, and Jhinabhai often took roasted grams or sometimes *pendas* for everyone.

When any of his classmates excelled in their studies, Jhinabhai would be very happy for them and pat them affectionately on the back while praising them. Often, if his friends shared a humorous anecdote, Jhinabhai would laugh merrily and pat them on the back. His friends would sometimes share such humorous incidents just to please Jhinabhai and receive his pat on the back!