

A: Pramukh Swami Maharaj Jivan Charitra Part 1 – Pages 1 to 45 (1921 to 1939)

Year	Month	Ref	Subchapter (Gujarati)	Subchapter (English)	Pages in Gujarati	Audio Track	Start	Summary
Amrutdhārā 1: Avināshinu Avataran – Birth of the Eternal								
		A1	<i>Bhāgyavanti Bhumi</i>	The Fortuitous Land	1-3	Amrutdhara 1: Track 02	02:10 mins	Description of Chansad; blessed by gunatit gurus
Pre 1921 CE		A2	<i>Punyavanto Parivār</i>	The Blessed Family	3-5	Amrutdhara 1: Track 02	08:49 mins	Devotion of Motibhai and Diwaliba
1921 CE	December	A3	<i>Avināshinu Avataran</i>	Birth of the Eternal	5-6	Amrutdhara 1: Track 02	15:25mins	Birth of Shantilal
1921 to 1935 CE		A4	<i>Shaishavno Vaibhav</i>	Glorious childhood	7-8	Amrutdhara 1: Track 02	19:18 mins	Shantilal's nature
		A5	<i>Mitabhāshi and Mitāhāri</i>	Minimal Speech And Minimal Food	8-9	Amrutdhara 1: Track 03	01:28 mins	Simple food; hardly spoke
		A6	<i>Tyāge Tape Purā Re</i>	Expert in renunciation and austerities	10-11	Amrutdhara 1: Track 03	05:25 mins	Austere
		A7	<i>Shānt ane Sulehkāri</i>	Calm Disposition	11-12	Amrutdhara 1: Track 03	09:44 mins	Amicable to all
		A8	<i>Sanvedanshil Shantilal</i>	Benevolent Shantilal	12-13	Amrutdhara 1: Track 03	11:52 mins	Sympathetic nature
		A9	<i>Prabhupremnā Pyāsi</i>	Thirsty for the Love of God	13-15	Amrutdhara 1: Track 03	14:17 mins	Devotion; disinterested in world
		A10	<i>Mandir Ja Ghar</i>	Mandir as home	16-17	Amrutdhara 1: Track 04	01:25 mins	Darshan and devotion at mandirs
		A11	<i>Vidyāvvyāsangi</i>	An Ideal Student	17-19	Amrutdhara 1: Track 04	07:03 mins	Studies in Chansad
		A12	<i>Vidyābhyāsmā vighna</i>	Disruption to studies	19-20	Amrutdhara 1: Track 04	12:36 mins	Year off in studies
1936 to 1939 CE		A13	<i>Santonā Sangmā Vicharanano Dor</i>	Vicharan in the Company of Sadhus	20-21	Amrutdhara 1: Track 04	15:31 mins	Village vicharan with sadhus
		A14	<i>Jakta Vikār Nahi Rati</i>	Free from Attachment to the World	21-22	Amrutdhara 1: Track 04	17:45 mins	Vicharan in Anand
		A15	<i>Bhidābhaktinā Bhogi</i>	Tolerating Hardships	22-24	Amrutdhara 1: Track 04	21:55 mins	Grapes for Ghanshyam Swami
		A16	<i>Vismrutini Smaraniya Lilā</i>	Memories of Forgetfulness	24	Amrutdhara 1: Track 05	02:10 mins	Vicharan with Mota Akshar Swami
		A17	<i>Vartalnā Darshane</i>	Darshan in Vartal	24-25	Amrutdhara 1: Track 05	04:09 mins	Vartal darshan
		A18	<i>Tapni Tālim</i>	Training in Austerities	25-26	Amrutdhara 1: Track 05	04:59 mins	First nirjala fast in Vaso
		A19	<i>Sadhu Thaine Shobhādshe</i>	You will Shine as a Sadhu	26-27	Amrutdhara 1: Track 05	08:44 mins	Bochasan <i>kediyu</i> ; Sanskrit lesson
		A20	<i>Rudī Ritnu Ghadatar</i>	Moulding According to the Noble Norms	27-29	Amrutdhara 1: Track 05	12:27 mins	Sweet lessons from Shastriji Maharaj
		A21	<i>Adhyayananu Punah Anusandhān</i>	Return to Studies	29-30	Amrutdhara 1: Track 05	16:51 mins	Studies in Petlad; admission to Padra
		A22	<i>Padramā Abhyāsno Ādar</i>	Studies in Padra	30-32	Amrutdhara 1: Track 05	20:47 mins	Studies in Padra; bicycle
		A23	<i>Kushal Ramatvir</i>	Expert Sportsman	32-34	Amrutdhara 1: Track 06	01:20 mins	Swimming, cricket and games
		A24	<i>Nokhā-Nirālā</i>	Different and Detached	34	Amrutdhara 1: Track 06	07:03 mins	Non-competitive
1939 CE	November	A25	<i>Mātra Ek Patra</i>	Merely One Letter	35-37	Amrutdhara 1: Track 06	08:33 mins	Planning cricket equipment; letter from Shastriji Maharaj
	November	A26	<i>Sukh Tanā Hatā Din Te Gayā</i>	Those Days of Enjoyment are now over...	37-38	Amrutdhara 1: Track 06	15:40 mins	Leaving friends behind
	November	A27	<i>Māngalik Mahāprasthān</i>	Auspicious Renunciation	38-39	Amrutdhara 1: Track 06	18:58 mins	Departure from home
	November	A28	<i>Āgnāmā ja Diwali</i>	Diwali at the Guru's Wish	39-40	Amrutdhara 1: Track 06	24:07 mins	Renunciation sentiments
Amrutdhārā 2: Shastriji Maharajnā Sangmā – In the Company of Shastriji Maharaj								
1939 CE	November	A29	<i>Gurumilananā Mārge</i>	On the Way to Meeting the Guru	41-43	Amrutdhara 2: Track 01	01:25 mins	Reaching Ahmedabad via Bochasan; vicharan with Nirgundas Swami
	November	A30	<i>Pārshadi Dikshāno Punit Prasang</i>	The Sacred Occasion of Parshadi Diksha	43-44	Amrutdhara 2: Track 01	08:02 mins	Parshad Diksha in Ahmedabad
		A31	<i>Javābdārithi Sabhān</i>	Understanding Responsibility	44-45	Amrutdhara 2: Track 01	10:52 mins	Seva in Bochasan
		A32	<i>Sanskritshikshānā Shri Ganesh</i>	The Beginnings of Sanskrit Studies	45	Amrutdhara 2: Track 01	13:05 mins	Start of studies in Bhadran

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Amrutdhārā 1

Avinashinu Avataran – Birth of the Eternal

A1: Bhāgyavanti Bhumi – The Fortuitous Land (pg 1-3)

[Description of Chansad; blessed by gunatit gurus]

- If you look at the fortuitous land in terms of the hemisphere of the earth, the village of Chansad village is situated close to Vadodara at a latitude of 22.3274° north and longitude of 73.0906° east. Around twelve kilometres southwest from Vadodara comes the border of Chansad. The special features of the village are felt by the newcomer as soon as one sets foot on the village outskirts.
- A quiet and picturesque atmosphere. Unpolluted ripples of air. A sloping lake collecting blue water. A distinctive fragrance rising from the dust of the village. Stress-free movement of naïve rural people. Low-roofed dwellings surrounded by some sturdy houses. Abyssal streams of water erupting like a fountain in the streets, often due to the washing of utensils on the threshold of the houses. Streets that are neither narrow nor wide, some of tarmac and some of soil. Two or four temples filling the village sky with sweet bells. The village courtyard is filled with the idle talk of villagers sitting with legs dangling or hands around their knees. The village school comprises a row of a few rooms. A water source satisfies the thirst of the villagers.
- It takes hardly an hour or slightly more to cross the village end to end. The water level is high here as Chansad is situated in the middle of fast flowing rivers such as the River Mahi and River Narmada. Residents rarely experience any shortage of water here. As soon as one sees the leaves hanging on the *ambli* trees on the border of Chansad, the combination of ample water and shade is apparent.
- The beautiful and splendid village of Chansad – replete with village resources – mostly belongs to the sons of the earth. Farmers earn their living by cultivating millet, sorghum, mung bean, moth bean, cotton, etc. These hard-working farmers toil from the early hours of the morning with their carts and handcarts to return home late in the evening. Their clothing and footwear are typical traditional village attire.
- There is nothing particularly eye-catching or extraordinary apparent in this village of Chansad. However, the nand paramhansa sadhus of Bhagwan Swaminarayan had visited this village as if aware of the sanctity of this land.

- This small village was a favourite of the gunatit gurus. Bhagatji Maharaj came here 32 times. In 1888 CE (Samvat 1944), the sacred image of Hanumanji was consecrated in this village at his auspicious hands.
- This unbroken love of the Satpurush continued to flow uninterrupted even in the time of Shastriji Maharaj. In 1905 CE (Samvat 1961), Shastriji Maharaj developed mouth ulcers due to heat. At that time, Mansukhbhai of Chansad told him: “You will have to take medicine of milk for three months; only then will this heat disappear.”
- That year, Shastriji Maharaj decided not to go to Vartal for the Chaitri festival. At the insistence of the doctor, he resided at the mandir in Chansad to take this treatment. Mansukhram kept a healthy cow specially for the treatment of Shastriji Maharaj. The milk of that very cow was given to Shastriji Maharaj every morning and evening along with medicine and sugarcane. Thus, the healing process began. At that time, Shastriji Maharaj remained in Chansad for one-and-a-half months and gave discourses day and night. At that time, Galbhai, Kalidasbhai, Motibhai,¹ etc. were blessed to have engaged in the service of Shastriji Maharaj.
- In 1926 CE (Samvat 1982), at the invitation of Muljibhai, Shastriji Maharaj came to Chansad to give the benefit of parayan for almost one month from 26 July (Ashadh Vad 1) to 21 August 1926 (Shravan Sud 12). This revealed his affection for this village.
- Soon after leaving Junagadh to join Shastriji Maharaj, Brahmaswarup Yogiji Maharaj stayed in Chansad for one year. Reminiscing on his daily routine at the time, he later said while in Chansad: “I stayed here for one year continuous. I was the guru, I was the disciple, I cooked, I swept, in fact I did everything. I was 16 or 17 years old. All the others were elderly. I was the only young one. So much energy, so much passion. If I sang kirtans, the roof tiles would vibrate. Ranchhod Bhakta would say: ‘Be careful the tiles don’t fall.’ If I spoke, my voice could be heard half a mile away. The loudspeaker could break. We used to wake up in the morning and bathe at the Vanjhariyo well. From 4.00am to 5.30am, we would recite the verses of ‘*Dhir dhurandhara*’. Continuous discourses. There were no difficulties. All day we would study [Swamini] Vatu, Vachanamrut and Chosath Padi. I would never get tired of singing kirtans.”
- In this way, for one year, Yogiji Maharaj remained immersed in the bliss of God in Chansad. Following this, he would come to Chansad from time to time.

Footnote 1: Purvashram father of Param Pujya Pramukh Swami Maharaj.

A2: Punyavanto Parivār – The Blessed Family (pg 3-5)
[Devotion of Motibhai and Diwaliba]

- Blessed with the holy footsteps of the gunatit gurus, it was as if this village had an indomitable yearning to serve in the vicinity of gunatit gurus. Events soon began to take shape as if God was intending to fulfil the aspirations of this village. As a first step, Motibhai was born in the Leuva Patidar community as one of the three sons of Prabhudas Patel.
- Motibhai was attracted to Satsang through the association of Shastriji Maharaj – the ardent propagator of Akshar-Purushottam Upasana. Going for darshan in the mandir every morning and evening, immersing himself in discourses and kirtans, and living a life according to the instructions of Shriji Maharaj; these were the inherent qualities of Motibhai. Whenever Shastriji Maharaj or sadhus came to the village, Motibhai would be fully engaged in their service like a shadow. Shastriji Maharaj was very much pleased with his flawless service and devotion.
- ‘*Durlabha sadrusha bharya*’ is a saying that explains that it is rare to find a wife with a similar nature as her husband. However, this was not the case with the devout Motibhai, who remained constantly engaged in devotion. Motibhai was soon married to Diwaliba, whose birthplace was the village of Menpura in Vadodara district.
- Diwaliba was the daughter of Shamalbhai and Jitaba Desai of Lachharas. Among her brothers were Tribhuvanbhai, Mathurbhai and Ranchhodbhai. She had no sisters. The family had association of satsang from the time of Bhagatji Maharaj. The legacy of that satsang was completely imbibed by Diwaliba. Her life revealed all the virtues of a noble and devoted woman.
- Whether it was to bring back wheat from the mandir to home for grinding or whether it was to graze the cattle when the carts came from Atladra Mandir, all these services were performed enthusiastically by Diwaliba. She also offered her selfless services when the foundations of the mandir in Chansad were laid.
- When Shastriji Maharaj commenced the construction of the mandir in Atladra, many women devotees from Chansad would go there for service. Diwaliba also joined in this laborious work with great enthusiasm. As if that were not enough, she would also prepare *dhebra* at home to feed the devotees offering their services in the construction work.

- Due to this strong two-sided satsang of both husband and wife, Motibhai's house would always remain peaceful like a mandir. All looked upon them as an ideal couple in the village. This belief of the villagers became more and more entrenched on certain occasions. Motibhai's immense faith in Bhagwan Swaminarayan and Shastriji Maharaj soon became the subject of legend.
- On one occasion, the son of Kamala, Motibhai's daughter, was close to premature death. When everyone realized that the chances of this child's survival were nil, Motibhai took his grandson in his lap and chanted the 'Swaminarayan' mantra. Such was the faith of Motibhai that impending death had to step back. After a while, the grandson started blinking his eyes and soon become fully conscious. All bowed down to Motibhai's deep faith.
- Another incident revealing Motibhai's unwavering faith also remained on the tips of the villagers' tongues.
- Once when Diwaliba was clearing out the dung, a snake suddenly came out and bit her. As a result, Diwaliba fell unconscious. Everyone was naturally shocked by the catastrophe. Motibhai alone remained stable – with full faith in Shastriji Maharaj! On this occasion, instead of calling a doctor or applying any household remedy to counteract the effect of the poison, Motibhai arranged for Diwaliba to be taken to the mandir for women in the village. He himself went to the main mandir next to the women's mandir and informed the sadhus about the incident. Hearing this, everyone chanted the Swaminarayan dhun to offer prayers for Diwaliba's recovery. In no time at all, Diwaliba's health improved to the extent that she was able to walk home.
- In this way, it was their staunch faith in Bhagwan Swaminarayan and Shastriji Maharaj that allowed the couple to live and lead their lives as ideal householders.
- On one occasion, Motibhai joined in vicharan with Shastriji Maharaj to benefit from his association. Meanwhile, news came that the wall of his house had collapsed in Chansad. Motibhai, however, was in no rush to return home. It was Shastriji Maharaj who had to ask him: "Motibhai! Don't you want to go home?"
- Motibhai responded: "You are the one who watches over and looks after everything; what need then is there for me to worry!"
- On this occasion, everyone saw the ideals of Janak the *videhi* in Motibhai.
- In this way, the tri-confluence of service, faith and understanding prevailed in this family. That was why everyone experienced the sanctity of Prayag in their house.

1921 CE

**A3: Avināshinu Avtaran – Birth of the Eternal (pg 5-6)
[Birth of Shantilal]**

- In such a pious family, auspiciousness was soon to sprout forth. The year was 1921 CE (Samvat 1978). Shri Krishna Bhagwan has said, '*Māsānam Mārgashirsho'aham*' – 'Out of all the months, I am the month of Magshar.'²
- It was in the same month of Magshar that God chose to come in a special form.
- The seven-day week reaches the middle of its cycle on Wednesday. The fortnight of the bright half of the fifteen days of every lunar month reaches its mid-point on Sud 8 – the eighth day of the bright half of the month. It was on Magshar Sud 8 – when the sky and the earth were coloured with the saffron aura of the gentle sun during the winter morning of 7 December 1921 – that the youngest son was born to this pious family in the village of Chansad some time between 8.00am and 9.00am.
- For the individuals at the family home and for those residing in the village, this may have seemed no more than the birth of another baby. But time was later to reveal that this was the moment of the appearance of the eternal, a moment celebrating the great fortune of creation, an auspicious moment for all humankind.
- Sunrise is never ordinary. Soon after the sun appears above the horizon, darkness disappears, dawn arises, drowsiness subsides, freshness abounds, flowers bloom, birds chirp and water shines. Like the sunrise, the manifestation of this son was also to be extraordinary, as this manifestation would subsequently prove to enlighten life by eradicating the darkness of many. This manifestation would subsequently prove to eliminate the lethargy of many. This manifestation was indeed to prove a source of inspiration to many. However, where is the key to solving the language of the future? The newly born baby was in no hurry to solve the language gap. With eyes closed, he slept peacefully on the lap of his mother.
- Motibhai celebrated the birth of his youngest son by feeding sweets to those in his vicinity. At that time, neither bells were rung nor were decorations hung; neither did crowds gather nor were songs sung. Looking at the Ganges initially flowing from its source of the *Gaumukh*, who would have guessed that this very stream was subsequently going to result in a huge river source going forward, spreading greenery in millions of hectares, creating plains fertile with silt and quenching the thirst of crores to earn the worthy title of 'Lokmata' – the mother of the earth? Similarly, on that day, no one had the vision to discern the giant Virat in a baby appearing as small

Footnote 2: Shrimad Bhagavad Gita: 10/35.

as the dwarf Vaman. For everyone, it was no more than the fact that another baby had taken birth in Chansad. But time was soon to explain that indeed the sun had risen and the stream had started flowing.

1921 to 1935 CE

A4: Shaishavno Vaibhav – Glorious Childhood (pg 7-8)

Those who are similar can meet with happiness, otherwise one stays away out of fear;

How can an ant meet an elephant, just as a pauper does not meet a king.

A child befriends a child, the great befriend the great;

The beast has fun with the beast and they are able to meet together.

One can easily be happy with one's own kind, which is simply not possible with others;

The flow of water meets with those...

Even if God gives darshan to others, people will be afraid thinking this is a ghost;

Only when God behaves as a human before humans, do humans experience happiness.

- These verses, originally in Gujarati, explain the purpose behind the human manifestation of Parabrahma. In order to give humankind the glimpse of divinity, God and the sadhu in constant communion with him become like mere humans by concealing divinity. However, even in human form, their spiritual powers, strength and glory are soon apparent. Such experiences constantly occur in their vicinity. Even the villagers of Chansad were soon to experience this glory.
- '*Balānām rodanam balam*' – the cry of a baby is its strength. It frequently cries loudly. It often becomes impatient. At that age, tolerance is but zero. Everyone's experience, however, with Diwaliba's son was somewhat different. Talking about her son's tolerance, she would later say: "He had so much tolerance from a young age. Despite chickenpox sores leaking so profusely that the exudate would stick to his clothes, he would barely protest. He was of a quiet nature from the very beginning."
- Perhaps that's why the parents decided to give the name of 'Shanti' ['Shanti' means peace] to their adorable son! Everyone experienced peace in his every action. Every action of his made everyone feel at peace. Peace spread when he spoke; peace emanated even from his silence. Seeing him, one understood the truth of the saying: '*Ākruti gunan kathayati*' – one's conduct reveals one's virtues.
- Once Shantilal suffered such intense diarrhoea that he had to go 15 to 20 times in one day. He ended up camping at a place known as Bhathiji's Ovar on the shores of the lake. This was because Shantilal had adhered to the rule of bathing after using the toilet to maintain bodily purity from a young age. Moreover, despite any emergencies or a serious illness, his insistence that not even the most minor commands of God should be violated was strewn in his blood. Therefore, to maintain his ritual of bathing, he remained under a tree near the lake. Due to diarrhoea, he became so weak that two people had to carry him back home. Shantilal, however, had not informed even

Footnote 3: 'Shanti' means peace

Footnote 4: Shri Harililamrut: 6/10/19-22.

his family members about the illness. Only when he was brought home, did everyone in the house realise that Shantilal had contracted such an illness. Otherwise, they had all thought that Shantilal had gone out somewhere.

- It was not at all in Shantilal's nature to weep or mourn to gain sympathy from others. Considering whatever situation came his way as God's wish, he was used to remaining in high spirits with a smiling face whatever the situation. On such occasions, any thoughtful person would think, 'This child is someone different!

A5: Mitbhāshi Ane Mitāhāri – Minimal Speech And Minimal Food (pg 8-9)

[Simple food; hardly spoke]

- From his childhood, Shantilal's tendency was to eat very little. Meals at home consisted mostly of white *juvar* – sorghum bread. On some special occasion, Diwaliba would make some *rotla* out of wheat or millet. Occasionally, there would be *dhebra*. Pulses, lentils with rice, curry with *khichdi* would also be prepared. Potatoes and *ghiloda* featured amongst the main vegetables. During the monsoon season, *ghiloda* would be cultivated in the garden of their house. So, the same vegetable was used over a four-month period. Shantilal thus ate such a simple and sattvic diet in small proportions.
- Shantilal sometimes even forgot to eat. He would end up eating after Diwaliba reminded him that he had still not eaten!!
- For school, if a lunch box of *puri* or *dhebra* was prepared, he would take that; otherwise he would not worry. If any money had been given to him for eating or drinking, often it would remain unspent. Occasionally, he would use it to purchase jalebi to share with his friends as a treat. Sometimes he would use the money to buy books from Padra.
- In this way, Shantilal had no interest in eating or drinking. He expressed no wish of what he liked or disliked. Sometimes when Diwaliba prepared *puran-poli*, he would show a slight desire to eat. Otherwise '*ras-niras barobar samu*' – tasty and untasty were one. Such was his nature. However, one thing was fixed in his mind – to eat only after offering *thal* to God. In that he never slipped up.
- Because of his thin frame, his mother would often call him whenever she went to milk the buffalo and force him to drink fresh milk. Shantilal, however, had little interest in drinking milk from a young age. To please his mother, he would accept a little and pass on the rest to somebody else. Therefore, there were no issue in his life regarding eating and drinking. Due to such indifference to diet, Shantilal's physique remained thin and weak. That is why his friend Shankarlal used to jokingly call him '*madiyu*'⁵.
- '*Mahiyānsah prakrutya mitbhashinah*'⁶ – Great personalities are temperate by nature. This trait was very evidently prevalent in Shantilal. Just as he ate very little, his words were also few. He was not fidgety, nor would he ever become agitated or angry.
- Whatever few words he did speak rang as music to people's ears. It was akin to the ringing of a silver bell with its sound constantly remaining in one's ears for years. Balkrishna Swami, an elderly sadhu from the time of Shastriji Maharaj, used to say:

“Once, the loft was being constructed in the old sanctified mandir in Chansad. I was also residing there with Shastriji Maharaj. Motibhai would come to serve and help. I remember seeing young Shantilal at that time. I still remember him uttering the sentence: ‘Shall I call my Bapuji?’”

- What a short sentence! What a long-term effect! Despite six long decades, these sweet words remained ever fresh in the memory of this sadhu. Such was the sweet speech of Shantilal.

Footnote 5: Referring to ‘Maddal’, a physically weak individual.

A6: Tyāge Tape Purā Re – Expert in Renunciation And Austerities (pg 10-11)

[Austere]

- One of the distinguishing features of Shantilal was that despite his reservation in speaking, he did not fail to speak up if the situation demanded. At an appropriate time, he would stand up for the truth and firmly say so accordingly.
- During Shantilal's early childhood, father Motibhai went to work in a village called Rajnagar in the district of Savli.⁷ Shantilal was also with his father. They must have stayed here for around nine years. Young Shantilal would play various children's games with his friends. On the outskirts of the village, they would often celebrate and enjoy eating mangoes together.
- In Rajnagar lived an eminent householder from the village of Bhadran called Chhotabhai. He lived in a large house on the same street as Shantilal's home.⁸ He had great affection for the young children. He would often gift a variety of items and dishes to please the children. During Fuldol, he would bring dates for everyone. He would bring kites during Uttarayan and also fireworks during Diwali. But amongst all these children, he had special liking for Shantilal. Chhotakaka would bring toys for him. He also arranged for a special teacher to teach Shantilal.
- One day, Chhotakaka nurtured a wish to cook something special to feed the children. For this purpose, he called all the children including Shantilal. However, Shantilal humbly but firmly remarked: "Today I am observing Ekadashi. Therefore, I won't be able to eat."
- Not expecting such an answer, Chhotakaka insistently told Shantilal: "What's the need for a child to observe Ekadashi? Not necessary! What's the big deal in eating once? Please sit down to eat with everyone."
- Shantilal, however, did not flinch. Due to everyone's insistence, tears welled up in Shantilal's eyes. Those tears deeply touched Chhotakaka. He backed off and ordered *falahari* items to feed Shantilal. People thought at the time: 'How surprising! Normally,

Footnote 7: Maganbhai of Savli was an esteemed figure in the-then state of Vadodara. Motibhai went to Rajnagar to cultivate the land of Maganbhai. He settled for a while in Tulsipara near Rajnagar.

Footnote 8: At that time, homes were constructed of wood. At the front would be metallic doors, often deep like the foundation. The home would consist of bamboo poles over which a mud-wall would be constructed. Such walls would not last long with rains or poor weather. Therefore, they had to be renewed every year. Entering the village, Motibhai's home was the fifth or seventh. At that time, many haribhaktas from the Karvania and Mandaliya background resided in the village. 70 to 80% of the population were devotees of Bhagwan Swaminarayan.

Footnote 9: Vachanamrut Kariyani 3.

kids would surely be tempted by such delicious food. And they would cry if denied that food. However, here was the opposite. Shantilal cried because he did not want to break his fast! Indeed, this child was of a different mettle!

- Bhagwan Swaminarayan has said, “One who is virtuous does not have an appetite for tasty food; and he continuously restrains his body.” This virtue of Shantilal was amply evident to everyone.
- Shantilal was never one to keep things in an untidy or haphazard manner. On one occasion, he described his natural inclination as a child, saying: “From the beginning, we would keep everything in order at home. From a very young age, everything would be neat and clean. Even if a school bag was not kept properly in place at school, we would make sure it was put straight.”
- In this way, the importance of elegance was woven in the life of Shantilal. ‘*Vali sadā game shuchipanu re...*’¹⁰ – Bal Ghanshyam’s nature of cleanliness was also apparent in Shantilal’s life.”

A7: Shānt ane Sulehkāri – Calm Disposition (pg 11-12)

[Amicable to all]

- ‘*Sheri e ramtā athadātā, chhorā rākhe dāvā re; sabal thai koi lie chuntiyo...*’ – ‘Playing or wandering in the street, kids naturally squabble; those who are strong end up pinching and fighting...’ This is the typical picture of childhood. Whose childhood was ever spent without quarrels or fights? Shantilal, however, was not at all touched by these influences despite his age.
- “From the beginning, I did not like to ever argue with anyone, nor did I ever like to see others arguing. It would pain me, and I would wonder why people argued. Even if there was reason for conflict, still I would not argue, merely tolerate. I would behave in such a way that the need for quarrel never arose. From early childhood, If I ever saw anyone fighting, I would keep a distance. Confrontation was never in my nature. In fact, I would become scared if others quarrelled, sometimes even cry if I saw others fighting.”
- Shantilal’s calm disposition was evident from these words uttered by Pramukh Swami Maharaj.
- His lifestyle was such that he was amicable to all. Apart from Shantilal, Motikaka’s and Diwaliba’s family consisted of their sons Dahyabhai, Nandubhai, Purushottambhai and daughters Kashiben, Kamlaben, Chanchalben, Savitaben, Gangaben and Dahiben.¹¹ Of all these siblings, Savitaben had a special love for Shantilal. Whenever sweets were gifted to the house during a special occasion, they would be distributed amongst the brothers and sisters. At that time, Savitaben would always give away her share to her younger brother Shantilal.

Footnote 11: Purushottambhai, Kashiben, Chanchalben and Dahiben all passed away in childhood.

A8: Samvedanshil Shantilal – Benevolent Shantilal (pg 12-13)

[Sympathetic nature]

- Childhood is mostly a parasitic existence. Therefore, it would be a burden for others to bear. Shantilal, however, was a mile apart compared to other children. He never ever thought of acting as a burden to anyone and behaved accordingly. In fact, this sympathetic behaviour of Shantilal was not limited to human beings. He cultivated the same sympathy for even mute animals or creatures.
- On Sundays or holidays, Shantilal used to go to pastures on the banks of the River Vishvamitri to graze livestock. At home, the family owned two buffaloes and a pair of oxen. After finishing lunch around 11am, he would leave with his friends and take around half an hour to reach the pastures, where the cows and buffaloes would graze. At that time, some of the children would even ride on the cows and buffaloes for fun. In the afternoon, these cattle would also take a dip in the river, with some of the boys sitting on them. Shantilal, however, never participated in this. If there happened to be a lot of water in the river, Shantilal would reach the opposite shore by holding on to a tail, rarely ever sitting on an animal. The mere thought of sitting on a cow or buffalo and hitting it brought shudders to him. As per the saying: '*Ātmavat sarva-bhuteshu yah pashyati sa pashyati...*' – One should feel the sentiments of all living beings as one's own. Whenever he went to graze cattle, Shantilal would take his textbooks with him. While the cattle were grazing, he would sit under the shade of a tree and read.
- In addition to grazing livestock, Shantilal also occasionally had to go to the farm. Motikaka's farm was located on the Itola side of the village and comprised of a field covering around 25 to 30 *vigha* of land. When the fields needed ploughing, Shantilal would also help by sitting on the plough.

A9: Prabhupremnā Pyāsi – Thirsty For The Love of God (pg 13-15)

[Devotion; disinterested in world]

- Recalling his childhood, Bhagwan Swaminarayan remarked, “Even as a child, I very much enjoyed such things as going to mandirs for *darshan*, listening to spiritual discourses, keeping the company of sadhus, and going on pilgrimages, etc.”¹² Everyone saw the same nature reflected in Shantilal.
- Once Swamishri was asked: “Did you have any personal hobbies as a child?”
- Hearing this, he responded: “There was no such hobby. We would go to the mandir and participate in *bhajan-kirtan*.”
- “What subject did you like as a child?” In answer to that question, his response was: “To worship God and inspire others to worship.”
- In this way, call it his hobbies or his lifestyle, they were both the same – *darshan* of God and devotion to God.
- Shantilal’s house was the first on the left-hand side of the sloping alley opposite the village *panchayat* square. Therefore, the beats and sounds of special programmes such as Ram Lila or dramas being enacted in the village could be seen and heard even while sitting at home. Shantilal, however, was in the least interested, never even caring to look in that direction. The age of radio had not yet arrived. Sounds consisted of metal dishes being beaten or gramophones playing in shops. Passing by shops, sounds did fall on his ears, but never did he allow them to enter within. Despite the enticements of such sense objects, Shantilal’s remaining detached was a natural childhood feature as if endowed from birth.
- In those days, Vadodara was witness to a royal procession every Dashera. Its splendour was indeed astounding, so much so that people from far-off villages flocked to view the magnificent spectacle. Although many of the village folk of Chansad thronged to Vadodara, Shantilal never had any interest in attending the procession.
- It so happened that Shantilal once went to Vadodara with Shankarlal and other friends on some occasion. Just as they were about to return home, they came across the procession to mark the Royal coronation of Gaekwad Pratap Singh. The crowds were jam-packed with no option of easy negotiation. Shantilal had no choice except to wait until the procession crossed Makarpura Road. At that time, the boys stood at the Kashi Vishwanath temple and witness the procession. It was only by chance that Shantilal saw this as a teenager. He had no inclination at all or interest to see any worldly sights.

Footnote 12: Vachanamrut Gadhada II 55.

- Shantilal's nature was such that he did not even have the wish to visit the homes of his relatives without any good reason. In fact, he only visited Lachharas, his mother's native village, barely five or six times. When going there, he would catch a train from Chansad to Chanod. From Chanod, he would cross the River Narmada by boat to reach the opposite bank. From there, he would sit in bullock cart to reach Lachharas. Whenever he went, he would stay there for 15 to 25 days.
- Shantilal would also sometimes go to Menpura, the native village of his maternal grandmother. To reach there he would go by bullock cart first to Por via Karali. From Por, it was an uphill trip along the slopes of the River Dhadhar before reaching Menpura. Here too, away from the hustle and bustle of the village, he would often come to the banks of the lake and immerse himself in meditation and devotional singing.
- In this way, detached from this world, Shantilal's morning would commence with devotion! His morning routine consisted of bathing followed by his puja rituals. In the early years, when residing in Rajnagar, although he was too young to have his personal puja, his devotion was such that if his mother or father were performing puja, he would sit next to them and look at the pictorial images with great fascination and attention. On the family's return to their native Chansad, Shantilal was given his personal puja set by Nana Akshar Swami, which he duly performed every day.
- Recalling these details, Swamishri would say, "I had the habit of performing puja from a very young age. I had my own personal puja."
- In his puja, he worshipped the pictorial images of Shriji Maharaj, Gunatitanand Swami and Shastriji Maharaj. He also applied *tilak-chandlo* daily. For that, he used the metallic U-shaped *tilakiyu* and would apply *chandlo* of *kumkum* with his finger.
- Shantilal was firm in adhering to the rule of drinking water or consuming food only after completing his daily puja. He also would make it a point of visiting the Swaminarayan Mandir in the village daily for darshan. That mandir was the place where he recalled his first darshan of Shastriji Maharaj! Swamishri would often say that it was Shastriji Maharaj's darshan that inspired him as a child to please him and act according to his wishes.
- Once a reporter asked Swamishri, "Can you enlighten us on what sort of spiritual experiences you have had?"
- Swamishri replied, "The main reason for our experience was grace of the guru! The association of Shastriji Maharaj was in itself a true experience."

- In this way, the lasting impression of the first darshan of Shastriji Maharaj was indelibly imprinted in Swamishri's heart.
- After completing school, Shantilal would invariably reach the mandir in time for the evening *sandhya* arti. On Sundays, he would go in the morning for darshan. In this regard, Diwaliba's encouragement played a crucial role. If by chance, darshan at the mandir was missed, that day, a meal would also be missed. "Did Shanti come for darshan yesterday or not?" That was the question that she would sometimes ask Lallu Bhagat who used to reside in the mandir. Shantilal's enthusiasm for devotion, however, was such that his mother was never disappointed.
- When Shantilal attended the evening *sandhya* arti, he would play the *nagaru* drums or *jhalar* cymbals. He would strike the cymbals, sometimes with one stick and at other times with two sticks. Naturally, other children also wished to play the instruments. Shantilal's style was unique in that if someone wanted to play the drum, he would play the cymbals. Conversely, if someone wanted to play cymbals, Shantilal would adjust and play the drum. In his life, there was not an iota of insistence or stubbornness. Even if he was right, he would not fall into the trap of petty squabbling. He would drop any matter at will. In this way, he always remained aloof from conflict.

A10: Mandir Ja Ghar – Mandir As Home (pg 16-17)

[Darshan and devotion at mandirs]

- Whenever sadhus such as Mota Akshar Swami, Ghanshyam Swami, Balmukund Swami and others would visit Chansad for festivals or any other occasions, the mandir itself would become Shantilal's home. It was from these sadhus that he learnt the arti and kirtans such as "Joi Murti Manohar...", "Dayalu Prabhu! Akshar-Purushottam..." etc. When he would go in the evening to the sadhus, they would lovingly pass on offerings such as *ladu* or *malpuva* kept aside specially for Shantilal. In this context, Swamishri often innocently joked: "We ate quite a bit of sanctified offerings. That's how we became sadhus!"
- In addition to the learned sadhus, Shantilal had also met the old devotees of Chansad including Galbhai, Kalidasbhai, Amthabhai and Muljibhai Vaidya. He treated them all with the utmost respect.
- Apart from the Swaminarayan Mandir in the village, the precincts of the Ranchhodrai Mandir, Satyanarayan Mandir and Hanumanmadhi were also frequented by Shantilal. He would go to Hanumanmadhi at least every two or three days, where he would always blow the conch whenever he attended. Haridas Bawaji – who came from Ayodhya – would often talk on the Ramayan. Sitting cross-legged with his right elbow on his right knee, Shantilal would keep the palm of his hand on his chin and listen with rapt attention. Seeing this, one would be reminded of young Ghanshyam sitting at Hanumanmadhi Mandir in Ayodhya and listening to the discourses. Shantilal's simple attire consisted of a cotton shirt and dhoti, reminiscent of some holy rishi. Sometimes, he would also wear a coat on top. At school, he would mostly wear shorts.
- One of his best friends lived in the same street. His name was also Shantilal. Their two houses both faced each other. When our Shantilal had to read, he would go to the place of Shantilal, where he would also eat and sleep before returning home in the morning. Such was their friendship. The friend Shantilal belonged to the Ramanandi sect and often took our Shantilal to the Satyanarayan Mandir. Ever enthusiastic, Shantilal would accompany him. He was respectful of all faiths. From the very beginning, the principles of truth were woven in his life akin to the sweetness in sugar.
- Sitaram Bawa was responsible for the worship at the Satyanarayan Mandir. He would often talk to these teenagers about Hardwar and Rishikesh. His talks would inspire the tide of devotion flowing in Shantilal's heart. So much so that the two friends firmly decided in their minds: "After completing our studies, we will go to Hardwar and engage in the worship of God."

- Devotional songs were performed at all these village mandirs, especially on the days of Ekadashi, Punam or other festivals. In addition to this, special session of bhajans were also arranged with great fervour and enthusiasm. Each mandir had their own bhajan groups which would sing and perform while standing. Some groups would also be dominated by *kartal* or *kansijodia*. Participating in such bhajans would give Shantilal much joy, a little like an avid runner discovering a downward slope. Such was his enthusiasm that these bhajans would often continue until 12 midnight, sometimes even 2am. Simultaneously, Shantilal would sway from one side to the other or wander while singing the bhajans. Occasionally, he would even play the *mrudang* or *tablas*. In his own words, he would refer to the rhythm as “*dhab-dhab*”.
- Recalling what type of bhajans were sung, he remembered one: ‘*Tāmbā-kundio jale bhari, tame nāvaṇ kartā jāo...*’
- On seeing Shantilal’s life resplendent with the sum of many noble virtues such as renunciation, penance, tolerance and devotion, everyone felt that this being had merely assumed the state of childhood. He remained totally untouched by the norms of the childhood state. This is also echoed by his birth chart. Seeing the birth chart prepared by Naranji Maharaj of Dadma, a learned astrologer once predicted: “This child will become very great. He will worship God and inspire countless others to do the same. Crowds will throng for his darshan, for which they would have to watch from a mile away.”

A11: Vidyāvyaṅgi – An Ideal Student (pg 17-19)

[Studies in Chansad]

- It is not unusual to find that one engrossed in spirituality tends to be weak in studies. Similarly, one deep in studies tends to neglect spirituality. Shantilal, however, possessed the ornaments of both spirituality and studies. After all, great individuals remain balanced, broad-based and versatile. They never lean to one side, look with one eye nor think one-sided. Shantilal was no exception.
- At that time, the school in Chansad was situated in Patel Vadi. Students would have to climb up one floor and sit in the classrooms. The headmaster Chhaganbhai Vipra would sit on the left side while the teachers of the third and fourth standards would sit on the right side. The other teachers would sit in the porch. The porch was enclosed and there was open space in between.
- It was at this school that Shantilal commenced his education. He studied with his classmates which included Chunilal, Shantilal, Bhailalbai, Haribhai, Ashabhai, Dahyabhai, Ambubhai, Chimanbhai, Ambalalbai and Umedbhai. One of his teachers was Haribhai. School hours lasted from 11am to 5pm daily, except for Saturdays when school would finish at 4pm. Slates, pens, textbooks and notebooks, etc. were the hallmarks of Shantilal's education. Textbooks and notebooks were purchased from either Padra or Vadodara.
- Shantilal's studies soon earned him a name as a brilliant student. On one occasion, Swamishri stated: "I would either come top or second. With me was Chunibhai Narer (Narhari) of Bamangam. If he was top, then I was second. If I was top, then he was second. Even in daily attendance, I was top. At that time in school, daily attendance would be taken at the end of the day. The one who got the top marks in mathematics throughout the day would sit accordingly the following day. Regardless of whether we occasionally reached school a little late, I would always be given either first or second place at the end of the day. This remained all the way up to standard five."
- In this way, during his studies in Chansad, Shantilal was amongst the top in his batch of students.
- He would never fall behind in his studies. Whatever he had learnt in school during the day was faithfully revised on returning home that same day. Shantilal would read and study with Chunilal. At exam times, they would read together until 1am or 1.30am at night. Shantilal would sleep at Chunilal's house and return home in the morning.

- Such were his preparations in studies that there was absolutely no fear of exams. Once Swamishri was asked, “Were you ever scared when you took exams?”
- He replied, “No, never. We would always go well-prepared! What was there to be scared of?”
- Even in the exam, Shantilal’s answers would always be written in the order in which the questions were asked in the question paper. “Saying Swaminarayan Swaminarayan, we would write the paper.”
- In addition to his brilliance in studies, his behaviour remained so impeccable that never once did his teachers have to punish him. When he finally did complete his schooling, he left his mark as a quiet, disciplined and orderly student. In this way, his formative years were dominated by an emphasis on spirituality as well as prominence in studies, shining brightly like the sun and the moon in the sky.
- It was during this period of study in Chansad, that Shantilal – at the age of about ten – went to Makarpara station for Shastriji Maharaj’s *darshan*. When Shantilal reached the station, Yogiji Maharaj exclaimed to Shastriji Maharaj: “Swami! The *mukhtaraj* from Chansad has come.” At the time, Shastriji Maharaj called Shantilal near him and gave him blessings.¹⁴
- Decades later, Yogiji Maharaj would fondly remember this incident: “I took him to Shastriji Maharaj. He was wearing a black coat and was well-dressed.”

A12: Vidyābhyāsmā vighna – Disruption to Studies (pg 19-20)

[Year off in studies]

- When Shantilal was admitted to school in Chansad, there were facilities to study up to 6th standard at that school. However, it so happened that by the time Shantilal had completed 5th standard, the class for 6th standard no longer existed due to lack of sufficient students. Shantilal was left with no choice, but to go elsewhere if he wanted to continue his studies. The nearby village of Darapara seemed to be suitable for further studies. Therefore, Shantilal reached Darapara to check the possibility of studying in 6th standard.
- One teacher in Darapara initially showed some willingness to start a class for 6th standard if there were at least ten students. Shantilal worked hard to find students. In the end, he did manage to gather ten to twelve students from Chansad, Patod and other surrounding villages. However, another obstacle arose. The teacher was not keen to start a new class as there was no student from Darapara in this group of students identified by Shantilal for 6th standard. So that was the end of that. Shantilal's year ended up without studies. Referring to this, Swamishri often said jokingly: "One year went merely in grazing cattle."
- Shantilal, however, was not dejected. After all, it was his natural instinct not to give up any task at hand even if thousands of obstacles arose. Seeing his deep interest for studies, Shantilal's parents decided to send him to Bochasan for further education. However, even in that, another issue arose. At that time, Bochasan was under the jurisdiction of British rule while Chansad was under the rule of the Gaikwad state. The ruling of that time meant that a student coming from a Gaikwad state school to a school under the British jurisdiction would have to enter the previous standard. Therefore, even though Shantilal had studied up to 5th standard in Chansad, a situation arose where he would have to re-enter 4th standard. How could the mind of a gifted student such as Shantilal possibly be prepared for this? Therefore, talk of going to Bochasan for further studies was abandoned.

Footnote 14: Some texts mention that this meeting took place at Vasad station. However, the above details – mentioned by Swamishri in Ahmedabad on 20 December 2006 – seem more likely.

1936 to 1939 CE

A13: Santonā Sangmā Vicharanano Dor – Vicharan in the Company of Sadhus (pg 20-21) [Village vicharan with sadhus]

- Shantilal was not one to waste any time. Thus, after completing 5th standard, he was careful to make the most of his precious time up to whenever his studies would resume. At this time, he joined the likes of sadhus such as Mota Akshar Swami,¹⁵ Ghanshyam Swami and Balmukund Swami of Junagadh during their *vicharan* in the villages.
- During this *vicharan*, Ghanshyam Swami was responsible for most of the discourses while Balmukund Swami would prepare the meals. Shantilal joined them by performing various services such as begging for alms, washing utensils and cleaning the dining areas. No task was too big or too menial for him. He undertook even unfamiliar tasks in such a manner that they would soon become second nature to him. Whatever service was assigned to him, he would immediately undertake with passion. Although this teenager was not one who needed to be taught the ideals of service and self-reliance, it can be said that this travelling with the sadhus trained him up for the future.
- At that time, it was the norm in each mandir to store utensils in a large container. Whenever sadhus came to the mandir, they would take out the utensils to use for cooking. Ghanshyam Swami's nature, however, was such that whichever mandir he went to, he would take out every single utensil to clean, even if he required only a few small pans for cooking. Shantilal would wash that whole pile of utensils, sometimes taking up to two hours. At that time, Ramji Bhagat was also very helpful. Balmukund Swami was affectionate and also took great care of Shantilal. He would collect water from a well to bathe Shantilal, teach him to wash dishes and also teach him kirtans.

Footnote 15: Mota Akshar Swami's original name was Sadhu Aksharpurushdas.

A14: Jaktā Vikār Nahi Rati – Free from Attachment to the World (pg 21-22)

[Vicharan in Anand]

- Once, when Shantilal was in Anand with the group of sadhus, Ghanshyam Swami sent Shantilal to the area known as the ‘street of Revandas’ opposite the mandir to bring pickles, *papad*, buttermilk, curd, *dhebra*, etc. Although most of the families residing in that area were devotees, one of the women was somewhat irritating. She would say to Shantilal: “Why are you going to become a sadhu? Did anyone tell you off at home that you are ready to become a sadhu? Will you be able to survive as a sadhu?” She would add: “If you can’t find a bride, then let me try; but what is the point of becoming a sadhu?” At that same house, one of the daughters was young as was the daughter-in-law. They would also tease Shantilal by saying words such as: “You have come to worship God at a young age, but you will not manage.”
- When this happened a couple of times at this house, Shantilal stopped going there. How could one who had not the slightest interest or experience of the world be interested in such mundane trivia? Any other teenager exposed to such talk would undoubtedly be tempted; ‘*Ati hoy jiyā avakāsh, toy nisare nārīne pās...*¹⁷ With such an intent, others would arrange to go to such places. Shantilal, however, was different and would become irritated on hearing such comments.
- Soon thereafter, arrangements were made to collect the necessary foodstuffs from the house of a devotee called Bhulabhai who also resided in the street of Revandas. Bhulabhai’s son was Purushottambhai. Purushottambhai’s wife was very affectionate and fond of young Shantilal. Whenever Shantilal came, she would first take him inside the house and feed him with *mathiya* and other items. After collecting the necessary materials, Shantilal would take leave.
- Close to the house of the senior devotee Motibhai in the street of Revandas lived a potter. He would always be quarrelling with his wife. The whole street would be witness to their arguments, but both the potter and his wife would continue unashamedly. Recalling this scene from his teenage years, Swamishri would say: “Such is the nature of the material world. Despite fighting and arguing, they always get back together. Nor do they fall out with each other. Even in satsang, such affection should be cultivated.”
- This was the unique nature of Shantilal! Be it something he heard, something he saw, or some individual, he would be able to gather something positive or useful for practising in one’s own life.

Footnote 17: ‘Wherever the opportunity arises, one would be tempted to go near women.’ – Bhaktachintamani, Vol. 102.

- During this stay in Anand, Shantilal would daily go to bathe at the well sanctified by Shriji Maharaj near the mandir of Rokadia Hanumanji. At the time, he would use a clothes bucket to draw water from the well. However, due to lack of experience, Shantilal found it difficult to draw the water. Balmukund Swami would patiently teach him. Seeing this, Ghanshyam Swami would say: “If he doesn’t even know how to draw water, what will he ever achieve going forward!”
- In this way, concealing his real strength, after bathing, Shantilal would sit with the sadhus for 30 to 45 minutes engaging in spiritual discussions at the side of the well. After lunch, he would rest at the Hanumanji Mandir in the afternoon, as it would be cool under the dome of the shrine. Mansang Bhagat, who resided at this mandir at the time, was kind-hearted. He would ensure that appropriate arrangements be made for the sadhus.

A15: Bhidābhaktinā Bhogi – Tolerating Hardships (pg 22-24)

[Grapes for Ghanshyam Swami]

- While travelling with the sadhus, Shantilal did undergo quite a bit of hardship. Ghanshyam Swami was a sadhu who was insistent on ensuring everything was proper. If things did not go according to plan, he would become annoyed and give a telling off. At that time, it was customary to wash utensils with ashes. If any ash remained stuck to the utensils during the process of washing, when that utensil dried, the ash would be exposed. If Ghanshyam Swami noticed that, he would pick up the utensil and throw it. Shantilal, however, would remain calm and continue his service with affection and understanding. In his later years, Swamishri would recall: “My nature was calm from the beginning. I hardly said anything. If Ghanshyam Swami called me a couple of times, I would maybe once say umm... He would tell me not to remain so quiet.”
- Once Ghanshyam Swami fell ill in Chansad. He required grapes to help his illness. He instructed Shantilal, “Go to Vadodara and get some grapes.” However, in those days, it was hardly convenient to even to go to Padra, never mind Vadodara. Swamishri used to often recall: “In those times, we hardly left home. Even going to Padra felt like something new! So much so that going to Vadodara was like travelling abroad; going to Padra was like travelling to Mumbai.”
- Sometimes, the village elders would take him to Padra. Leaving their carts by the banyan tree, they would go about their work in the village, leaving Shantilal behind to sit and look after the carts and the oxen. Shantilal would feed the oxen with fodder and take care to ensure that it was not consumed by goats. So even if he did make it to Padra, he would end up looking after the carts. Therefore, he had little experience of going out to do any shopping. It was with this background that Ghanshyam Swami sent Shantilal to buy some grapes by going with someone travelling to Vadodara. Understanding the importance of *agna*, Shantilal left and soon returned after bringing some green grapes from Vadodara.
- As soon as he put the grapes before Ghanshyam Swami, the latter exploded and exclaimed: “What a fool! Where did you get such grapes? Did I tell you to bring such grapes? If you didn’t know, why did you go? If you didn’t know, why didn’t you say no! I arranged money for you to buy grapes and you brought these grapes!” In this way, he reprimanded Shantilal.
- Actually, what Ghanshyam Swami had wanted was dry black grapes. However, he did not clearly specify this to Shantilal, thus resulting in the misunderstanding! Shantilal quietly tolerated this scolding and continued to serve Ghanshyam Swami with the same affection and enthusiasm as before.

A16: Vismrutini Smaraniya Lilā – Memories of Forgetfulness (pg 24)

[Vicharan with Mota Akshar Swami]

- Once during the course of *vicharan* with Mota Akshar Swami, after travelling in Dabhau, Goriyad, Sankarda, Sokhda, Anjesar, Sarsa, Navli, Ashi, Piplav, Gana, Radhu, etc. Shantilal reached the village of Dungri-Timba Lat, where they reached the house of a devotee called Prabhudas.
- From there, the group needed to go to Nenpur. Accordingly, Prabhudas untied the oxen and attached them to a cart in preparation. Akshar Swami, however, said: “Nenpur is not that far. It’s just here!” With these words, he refused to use the cart and got ready at 4pm in the afternoon with cloth bags on his head, all prepared to walk. At that time, pointing his finger at Shantilal, Prabhudas again requested: “He is still young. Please take the cart.”
- Saying nothing more than ‘hmm’, Akshar Swami started to walk ahead and the others soon followed. Akshar Swami, however, was not one familiar with directions and soon they were all lost. They carried on walking until darkness fell, but there was no sign of the village. Just then, they spotted the bridge over the River Vatrak. Seeing this, Akshar Swami exclaimed: “Oops! What’s this? Oh my God, this is Mahemdavad!”
- Now what to do? After bathing in the river, they all walked along the track of the railway line and managed to reach Nenpur at 9pm that night. They then all ate the *khichdi* that had been prepared by Nirgundas Swami and Balkrishna Swami, who had arrived earlier.
- In this way, experiencing much in the way of new encounters, Shantilal still enjoyed each and every situation, and continued to serve with joy, enthusiasm and positivity.

A17: Vartalnā Darshane – Darshan in Vartal (pg 24-25)

[Vartal darshan]

- Once during this *vicharan*, this group of sadhus met Shastriji Maharaj in the village of Sunav. At that time, Dadabhai of Bhadran was going to Vartal for darshan. Shastriji Maharaj told Shantilal: “You go with him, so that you can also do darshan of Vartal.”
- At that time, sitting in a cart, Shantilal reached Vartal.¹⁸ At this sanctified place of pilgrimage, Shantilal was delighted to have the darshan of Harikrishna Maharaj. He also enjoyed the darshan of the places as well as items sanctified by Shriji Maharaj. He placed the sanctified dust of this land on his head with respect and reverence.

Footnote 18: Before this visit, Shantilal had previously gone to Vartal when he was around six years old. At that time, he was part of the group that had departed from Rajnagar to reach Dakor, following which they went to Vartal for the Punam festival.

A18: Tapni Tālim – Training in Austerities (pg 25-26)
[First nirjala fast in Vaso]

- During this *vicharan*, Shantilal also had darshan of Shastriji Maharaj in Vaso. Everyone had put up at the old Swaminarayan Mandir in the village. One of the days during their stay was the day of Ekadashi, and on that day Shastriji Maharaj instructed Shantilal to observe a complete fast without water. He must have been 15 or 16 years old at the time. This was the first time in Shantilal’s life that he had ever attempted a total fast without any food or water. As he was not used to such practices, Shantilal found it somewhat difficult to pass the day. Shantilal, however, was not one to quit out of cowardice. He did manage to complete the waterless fast.
- On the following day of *barash* at 6.30am, Shastriji Maharaj woke Shantilal up. As soon as Shantilal had completed his bathing and morning puja rituals, Shastriji Maharaj helped him to break the fast by feeding him *khichdi* and buttermilk. Unfortunately, Shantilal started to vomit. Warm milk with mint was prepared and administered to which he responded well.
- In this way, Shantilal passed the difficult test that Shastriji Maharaj had given him. Shastriji Maharaj expressed his pleasure and showered him with blessings. Following this, he got so used to observing waterless fasts, that he continued to fast regularly on Ekadashi and other special days all the way to the sixth decade of his life.
- In addition to this incident of fasting, Swamishri also recalled another moment from this same village: “When I was young, I had gone to Vaso. Shastriji Maharaj was also with me. Discourses would start in the morning and last until midday. Re-starting at 4pm, they would continue until the evening arti. The elders would come wearing a *kediyu* and *khes*, and after taking off their headgear, they would turn the rosary while listening to the discourses. At that time, they were not so well off, but their Satsang was staunch. Devotees would also recite discourses.”
- From childhood, Shantilal’s nature was appreciative. Whenever he saw something good or virtuous, he would immediately take note of it. He would keep it in his mind even years later.
- During this time, Shantilal also travelled to Nagasar with Shastriji Maharaj. The group reached Jakhwada station at 8pm. Unfortunately, no carts had been arranged to collect the group. Shastriji Maharaj tied his upper cloth around his waist and started walking, a stick in one hand and his other hand holding a devotee’s hand. All tried to persuade him to wait for the carts to arrive, but he continued to walk. In this way,

Footnote 19: For devotees of the fellowship, the ritual of giving a double-threaded *kanthi* made of Tulsi wood for the aspirant to wear around his or her neck is called ‘initiation’ in Satsang terminology.

accompanied by Shastriji Maharaj, Shantilal trekked for two long hours before reaching Nagasar at 10pm.

- In this way, the *vicharan* of the sadhus continued unabated. For one whose future *vicharan* was to fill volumes upon volumes, this was merely a short prelude.
- When Shantilal reached Ahmedabad from Nagasar, he also visited the home of Jethiba in Rangila Pol and also witnessed the samadhi that she experienced. Also present there at the time was Gulzarilal Nanda, who later went on to become the caretaker Prime Minister of India twice and was also subsequently awarded the prestigious honour of 'Bharat Ratna'.

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A19: Sadhu Thaine Shobhādshe – You will Shine as a Sadhu (pg 26-27)

[Bochasan *kediyu*; Sanskrit lesson]

- During the *vicharan*, after travelling to the villages of Goriyad, Sarsavni, Sejakuva and others, Shantilal reached Bochasan. Here, he offered his services in whatever way possible. He would also play with Amrut and Ghanshyam, the grandchildren of Dattaram Barot.
- During this stay in Bochasan, Akshar Swami once tested Shantilal by saying: “You now stay here. Let us initiate you as a sadhu in white.”
- Shantilal had absolutely no objection to this, but he informed Akshar Swami: “Let’s ask Shastriji Maharaj first before proceeding.”
- Shastriji Maharaj was due to arrive shortly in Bochasan for the festival of Guru Punam. So Akshar Swami himself was in no rush to proceed. However, fifteen days before the festival of Guru Punam, he called a tailor as he had a thought: “Let’s prepare a *kediyu* suitable for Shantilal to wear as a parshad.”
- When Shantilal came to know of this, he immediately went straight to the mandir farm and hid in some corner. Akshar Swami sent someone to find Shantilal, but even after almost one-and-a-half hours of frantically searching, Shantilal was nowhere to be found.
- Only when Shantilal was confident that the tailor had left did he return to the mandir. Seeing him, Akshar Swami immediately rebuked him: “Where did you go! I wanted to sew a *kediyu* for you.”
- Shantilal’s response was polite, but firm. “Please don’t talk about a *kediyu*. I don’t want to wear that.”
- Shantilal had no issue with taking initiation, but his saintly and simple nature preferred unstitched clothes befitting a sadhu as opposed to wearing a sewn *kediyu*. That is why he was reluctant and went in hiding.
- When Shastriji Maharaj reached Bochasan a few days following this incident, Akshar Swami took Shantilal to him and said: “This is a very good boy, one who could become a sadhu.”

- Naturally, this idea was already playing in Shastriji Maharaj’s mind. After all, when he had initiated¹⁹ Shantilal as an infant, he had told Motibhai: “He is ours and please offer him to us.” So Shastriji Maharaj found Akshar Swami’s words appropriate. However, he said: “Let’s allow him to study.”
- Not only that, but at that time to test Shantilal’s ability, Shastriji Maharaj gave him a lesson to learn the various forms of the noun ‘Rama’ from the text of the ‘Shabd-rupavali’. Within no more than half an hour, Shantilal completed the lesson and confidently recited the various forms to Shastriji Maharaj. Seeing this, Shastriji Maharaj was overjoyed and remarked: “You are capable of becoming a scholar and also a ‘Shastri’. Clever indeed. You will shine as a sadhu.”
- “If a diamond is already glittering before it is even polished, imagine how it would shine after being polished?” Something like this must have been playing in Shastriji Maharaj’s mind regarding Shantilal.

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A20: Rudi Ritnu Ghadtar – Perfect Moulding (pg 27-29)

[Sweet lessons from Shastriji Maharaj]

- During his stay in Bochasan, Shantilal once sat with a sadhu called Shriharidas for Satsang. This aged sadhu had fed *rotlas* to Aksharbrahma Gunatitanand Swami. Therefore, understanding him to be an ‘elderly and sanctified’ sadhu, Shantilal went to sit with him. This sadhu, however, uttered words of discouragement to Shantilal: “You have come to become a sadhu, but here you will have to work hard. Rather than travelling in the villages, it would be better to remain at home. And who will look after you when you fall ill? Therefore, stay at home and offer devotion.”
- Expecting a flower, but receiving a thorn instead, Shantilal was horrified to hear such words. He asked the sadhu: “So why then did you become a sadhu? Did you face any difficulty?”
- “We have already become, but I am saying this for your own good,” replied the sadhu.
- Of course, Shantilal was not one to be poisoned by such negative words. However, when Shastriji Maharaj came to know about this, he explained to Shantilal the importance of understanding company: “Don’t sit with one who speaks word of discouragement.” Following this incident, Shantilal would go to touch that sadhu’s feet, but avoided listening to his talks.
- At that time, an elderly man by the name of Prabhudas Barot also lived in Bochasan Mandir. He thought he could place others in *samadhi*. Although his capability to put others in a trance-like state was zero, his confidence was inflated with ego. Once this individual called Shantilal close to him and sat him in the assembly hall and claimed: “Boy! Sit with me. I will put you into *samadhi*.” Who would not be curious? Therefore, Shantilal sat on the floor, cross-legged with eyes shut!
- Shantilal must have spent around ten minutes in this posture when Nirgundas Swami happened to pass by. When he noticed Shantilal in such a meditative state, he bluntly asked him: “For what are you sitting here with your eyes closed?”
- “This devotee had promised to put me in *samadhi*,” Shantilal replied somewhat naively.
- Hearing this, Nirgundas Swami got agitated. He reprimanded the devotee and forced Shantilal to leave from there. Not only that, but Nirgundas Swami also reported this

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to Shastriji Maharaj. Shastriji Maharaj subsequently called Shantilal and asked him: "What is Nirgundas Swami saying?"

- Shantilal replied innocently: "I had heard that he was placing all in *samadhi*. Therefore, with the intention of going into *samadhi*, I also sat down at the request of the devotee."
- Hearing this, Shastriji Maharaj said: "You already have *samadhi*."
- "But how could that possibly be believed? And how could it be understood?"
- Shastriji Maharaj questioned: "What do those who claim *samadhi* say?"
- "They say that first Shastriji Maharaj is seen. Then Maharaj is seen. The bliss of Akshardham is experienced."
- Shastriji Maharaj then said to Shantilal: "That *murti* is already sitting in front of you. If this is understood, one does not need to go into *samadhi*, yet unbroken happiness is experienced. If one develops firm affection in this, nothing else remains to be seen. Everything will be seen in that alone. Bliss will be experienced. Therefore, never harbour such a wish ever again."
- After hearing these words of Shastriji Maharaj, Shantilal never nurtured any desire regarding *samadhi*. In this way, Shastriji Maharaj was gradually moulding his beloved disciple according to the noble norms and practices of Satsang.

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A21: Adhyayanānu Punah Anusandhān – Return to Studies (pg 29-30)

[Studies in Petlad; admission to Padra]

- *Vīta-spruhāṇām-āpi mukti-bhājām bhavanti bhavyeshu hi paksha-pātāha* |²⁰ Even one who is detached and only seeks liberation, he still has partiality for those who are great. It was apparent that because of Shantilal's noble virtues, Shastriji Maharaj was drawn to him with special feelings of deep attachment. Shastriji Maharaj himself had thought of a study plan for Shantilal at this time. He had already arranged for Hariswarupdas of Dholka to study Sanskrit under the Shastri in Petlad. Shastriji Maharaj also decided to keep Shantilal with them and gave instructions to Naranbhai who lived there to take care of Shantilal.
- However, studies in Petlad lasted for hardly a month before they came to an end for some reason. Shantilal went to Bochasan. Motibhai had also come from Chansad at the time. Shastriji Maharaj spoke to him about Shantilal's Sanskrit studies. Motibhai mentioned: "Shantilal has a desire to study. We have thought about enrolling him at the English school in Padra. But whatever you decide and instruct."
- Hearing Motibhai's words, Shastriji Maharaj agreed to Shantilal studying in Padra, as there was no possibility of continuing studies in Petlad. In this way, any talk of Shantilal being initiated soon as a sadhu was also put on hold. He returned to Chansad with his father.

A22: Padramā Abhyāsno Ādar – Studies in Padra (pg 30-32)

[Studies in Padra; bicycle]

- Shankarlal and Muljibhai both used to take Shantilal on their bicycles to Padra. However, with the feeling of ‘one’s own happiness lies in the happiness of others’, Shantilal was more concerned about not causing inconvenience to others rather than considering his own convenience. He was pained that his friends had to take on this extra burden. Even though his friends were more than willing to take him, Shantilal would often walk the distance to Padra and return home on foot the same way. He sometimes covered an average distance of 10 to 12 kilometres per day by foot, yet never did this adversely affect his studies in the slightest. His sincere efforts to excel in education are reflected in the characteristics of an ideal student.
- And so, the only option left for Shantilal was to go to the school in Padra for further studies. At that time, Shankarlal and Mulji, both teenagers from Chansad, were already studying at the English school in Padra. There was a slight problem in that the distance from Chansad to Padra was around five to six kilometres. One would have to go on a bicycle. Initially, Shantilal did not have a bicycle of his own. However, both friends were willing to give Shantilal a ride on their bicycles. Shantilal’s nature was so sweet and sociable that even in the face of adversity, everyone longed for his presence. It was as if his presence posed no difficulties.
- Thus, with the assurance of a ride from his friends, Shantilal soon gained admission in the first standard²¹ of English at the school in Padra.
- After passing the fifth standard in Chansad up to his eventual admission to Padra’s high school, the many efforts and trials along the way reflect Shantilal’s extraordinary longing for meaningful studies.
- Wherever he tried for higher studies, be it Darapara, Bochasan or other places, there were no openings. However, as the saying goes: “*Na Nishchitārthād viramanti dhirāha...*” – Those who are patient do not stop until they achieve their set goal. Accordingly, Shantilal did not stop or lose heart. Ultimately, his efforts bore fruit and his studies resumed full-fledged.
- A few months after resuming studies, Shantilal’s family managed to procure a second-hand Hercules bicycle for around 15 rupees. After learning the basics of bike-riding from Shankarlal, Shantilal started travelling to Padra on his bicycle. Ring... Ring... The sight of Shantilal going to study on a bicycle ringing the bell was indeed novel and heart-warming for the villagers. Mostly, he would depart from Chansad and reach Padra via the villages of Bil and Chapad. Occasionally, he would go via Darapara.

- To satisfy the curiosity of a devotee, Swamishri once recalled: “Naturally, everyone would fall once or twice in the process of learning how to ride a bike. But I never fell in a way that would cause injury. Yes, I had fallen two or three times, but I would ride slowly and carefully. After learning how to remain balanced, I could even ride keeping my hands free.”
- At the school in Padra, on the left side of the ground floor were two rooms where Shantilal studied. He would invariably sit on the front bench. His classmates included Dahyabhai of Latipura and Umedbhai of Goriyad. A Maharashtrian teacher by the name of Laljibhai Kotia used to teach Shantilal. His son Mohan was also studying with Shantilal.²²
- Shantilal’s mother would provide a packed lunch usually consisting of *dhebra* and wheat *chopda* prepared by using jaggery water. Sometimes she would also provide *vadā*, pickles and sweet *puri*. Shantilal would fill his own water bottle. Opposite the school in Padra was a workshop of wood belonging to Rambhai Amin of Vaso. This Rambhai was known to Shantilal as he would come to Chansad from time to time for the purpose of collecting dues. Shantilal would park his bicycle and keep his lunch box at the workshop.²³ He would go there during break time to eat his lunch.
- Shantilal’s favourite subjects were Gujarati, geography, history and mathematics. In mathematics and history, he achieved top marks. Initially, he had no real interest in learning English. However, when Shankarlal and his other friends proposed to him to learn English, he readily showed a willingness to study the subject.
- During this period of studies in Padra, Shantilal learnt poems such as: “*O Ishwar bhajie tane...*” and sayings such as “*Māmānu ghar kete? Divo bale etle...*” as well as proverbs such as: “*Māre ene parbadi ne māre ene mahudānu sāl...*” Even in his latter years, Swamishri would recite some of these sayings to the delight of all. On top of this, recalling mathematical tables, he would say: “*‘Ek savāe savā, lādvā khāvā javā; lādvāmā padi kadhi, ne be savāe adhi.’* This is what the teachers would teach us in school. Through such methods, it would help us to memorise such facts.” He added: “*Jetlā rupeeye maṇ etlā āne adhi sher... pāyā, adadhā, dodhā, savāyā, adhiyā ne uthā...*”

Footnote 21: At the time, this was equivalent to the normal fifth standard of one’s academic career.

Footnote 22: Laljibhai was originally from Gujarat, but his forefathers settled in Maharashtra. His son, Mohanbhai, would often come to Swamishri to ask for *dakshina*: “My father was the one who taught you, so please give *dakshina*.”

Footnote 23: An artistic shrine of marble now adorns this sanctified place.

A23: Kushal Ramatvir – Expert Sportsman (pg 32-34)
[Swimming, cricket and games]

- The two streams of spirituality and studies flowed in parallel in Shantilal’s life much like the rivers of Ganga and Yamuna. At the same time, he was a talented boy and his expertise in various sports was astounding.
- His skills in swimming were unmatched. He could easily swim from one end of the village lake to the other without any break or fatigue. In addition to length, he also liked depth. As if measuring the massive lake with his bare hands, he would sink deeper and deeper. So much so that he could easily go to the bottom of a twenty-foot deep well or the lake to retrieve any pots that may have reached the base. This skill of rescuing the drowning and bringing those at the bottom to the top was to become proficient in many fields over time.
- If the village lake filled up due to rains, the village chief would go to offer *pujan* and coconuts as a mark of respect. The young boys would race among themselves to see who could swim the fastest to retrieve the coconut. Another boy from the same village, Chhotu, was also a good swimmer. Shantilal would often enter into a competitive swimming race with him and frequently achieve victory by retrieving the coconut. While bathing in this lake, Shantilal sustained minor injuries to his legs in two places, marks of which remained visible even during his advanced age.
- In addition to being a skilful swimmer, Shantilal was also adept at playing cricket. Where the medical clinic is currently located on entering the village, there was a playing field. Here his batting skills would score fours and sixes. Swamishri would say: “Yes, we did play cricket, but not to the extent that it dominated our lives. We would play for maybe one or two months, not more. Then we came here to worship God...”
- Actually, after coming here, his work of scoring boundaries still continued – the difference being that the playing field was now replaced by the whole world, and the cricket was replaced by various Satsang activities.
- Once Swamishri recalled: “Just like kids now play football, we also used to play with a ball made of clothes. I would run with that ball and no one would be able to catch me.”
- The vast and dark shade of the *Khodi Ambli* tree near the Hanumanmadhi Mandir also served as a playground for Shantilal. How many times that village dust must have been sanctified as on Sundays, Shantilal would come here with his friends to play games such as *bhamarda*, marbles, *hutututu*, *kho-kho* and *ambli-pipli*. Among those, he enjoyed the game of *kho-kho* most. While playing *bhamarda*, he would spin and

release the spinning top before immediately grabbing it with his hand, without it even touching the ground. One fact noteworthy from that time was that Shantilal was right-handed in most activities, but when he played marbles, he played with his left hand. Truly the title of 'Savyāsāchin' once coined by a poet would be most appropriate to describe his abilities.

- Shantilal was also an expert at kite flying. Climbing on the roofs of houses or going to the village outskirts, he would enjoy flying kites.
- “While flying the kite, when it came into touch with someone else’s kite, I would pull my kite a little before loosening it to cut the other kite.” In this way, Swamishri would reminisce about his kite flying techniques while imitating the action of rubbing the palm of his right hand on the palm of his left hand.
- He would also play with a babul tree stick and a ball made of cloth. This game was played at night, especially during the time of Holi. During Diwali, various firecrackers would be exploded. Occasionally in the village, someone would come to put on a show such as ‘Look at Mumbai, look at Delhi’ using boxes to display pictures. The village boys would pay two or three paise and gather to watch the show. Shantilal would also accompany his friends to participate.
- Describing the fortunes of the residents of Vraj, Ved Vyas has written:

*Aho! Bhagyam-aho! Bhagyam Nand-gopa-vrajaukasām |
Yan-mitram Paramānandam purnam Brahma sanātanam ||²⁴*

“How fortunate are Nanda, the gopas and the residents of Vraj that the eternal Purna Brahma – the very form of Paramanand – has come and become a friend to all of them!”

- As if the composers of the scriptures had another opportunity to utter such words, Shantilal also became a friend and one with the residents of the village of Chansad. However, much like the residents of Vraj were unaware of their fortune, similarly those naive villagers were also unaware that they were playing with ‘the eternal and infinite Aksharbrahma!’

A24: Nokhā-Nirālā – Different and Detached (pg 34)

[Non-competitive]

- Sportsmen are often at their peak during adolescence. With the element of rising competition in their lives, thoughts of defeating others and establishing one's own superiority play in the mind. Among them, for one with expertise in both studies and sports to the fullest extent along with a variety of other skills, it is but natural to show off one's abilities to others. Shantilal, on the other hand, was totally different and detached compared to the common man. He was never one to reveal his achievements or skills; in fact, he would go out of his way to conceal them.
- Once Swamishri was asked: "Did you ever enter in competition in eating food?" He replied: "Never. We would only eat what we could. No more. And never engaged in any contest whatsoever."
- Taking a look at his unique youth, it was evident that Shantilal was a sportsman without ambition, a student without ego, a kind-hearted person without any selfishness, an individual without impurity and a humble devotee.

A25: Mātra Ek Patra – Merely One Letter (pg 35-37)
[Planning cricket equipment; letter from Shastriji Maharaj]

- Around the time of Shantilal’s sixth standard six-monthly exams, Shastriji Maharaj came to Chansad. When Shantilal went to the mandir for his darshan, Shastriji Maharaj told him: “You have to become a sadhu.”
- Shantilal replied: “What should I do about my studies?”
- Hearing this, Shastriji Maharaj explained: “Vinubhai’s [Vinayakrao Trivedi’s] high school is in Ahmedabad. Khengarjibhai Master there will teach both you and this Aksharjivan.²⁶
- Hearing these words, Shantilal nodded in affirmation and readily consented to his guru’s wishes.²⁷
- Shastriji Maharaj had already told Motibhai: “We have to exchange a head for a head. Because the other one returned, in his place, give this one [Shantilal] to us instead.²⁸
- In this way, both father and son gave their full consent for Shantilal to become a sadhu. Nor was there any issue in getting approval from Shantilal’s mother. For Diwaliba, there was simply no world outside the will of Shastriji Maharaj.
- And so it was decided that as soon as Shantilal’s examinations were complete, he could leave with Shastriji Maharaj.
- Shastriji Maharaj, however, had to leave Chansad all of a sudden when he received an urgent telegram message from Naranbhai from the village of Gana. As he was departing, he instructed Ghanshyam Swami: “Please bring Shantilal to Bochasan as soon as his examinations are over.” However, shortly after Shastriji Maharaj’s departure, Ghanshyam Swami had to rush to Bhayli. Following his exams, Shantilal was left wondering, “Where to go now and who to meet?” With no clear decision in sight, Shantilal continued his usual activities.
- During the period of Shantilal’s studies in Padra, an individual by the name of Ramanbhai came to the village to work for the government in some capacity. A great fan of cricket, he had cricket equipment, but no one to play with! He would gather the village boys every day and encourage them to play. This must have continued for about a year before Ramanbhai left the village to go elsewhere. Now the boys were hooked to the game and everyone got together and decided, “Let’s arrange for our own bats, balls and stumps.”

- To discuss this matter, the boys got together on the grounds of the school on the village outskirts. They considered the idea of collecting funds for sports equipment. As soon as the required amount was collected, everyone looked to Shantilal to go to Vadodara to purchase the equipment. Everyone was well aware of Shantilal's nature as well as confident that he would be able to get goods worth 100 rupees for only 60 rupees. Whenever something important needed to be done, Shantilal was the natural choice.
- In this way, Shantilal was chosen to go to Vadodara. He agreed and asked his friend Shankarlal to accompany him. It was in his nature to keep everyone together and work. Accordingly, it was confirmed that Shantilal and Shankarlal would both go to Vadodara together.
- Just as these discussions were ongoing, Ravjibhai of Bhayli entered the village with a letter in his hand. This was no ordinary letter. It was a letter written by Shastriji Maharaj informing Shantilal to come to become a sadhu. Ravjibhai went to Shantilal's home, where he learnt that Shantilal was with his friends on the village outskirts. Ravjibhai soon reached there and told Shantilal about Shastriji Maharaj's letter.
- Hearing the news, Shantilal remarked: "Good. I am ready."
- Turning to his friends, Shantilal then informed them: "Shastriji Maharaj's letter has come and therefore, I want to go. And when I say go, I mean that I will not be coming back. I am going to become a sadhu. So all of you continue with your work and arrange to procure the equipment accordingly."
- In this way, on the basis of merely one letter, Shantilal prepared to change the course of his life forever. This would only have been possible for someone who, despite living in the world, remained untouched by its attachments and attractions.

Footnote 26: Aksharjivandas Swami's original name was Gordhanbhai and he became a sanyasi after becoming disillusioned with his stepmother. After understanding the glory of Shastriji Maharaj from Lakha Bhagat of Dabhau, he took initiation as a sadhu.

Footnote 27: Years later, Swamishri was asked: "What moment from your childhood do you instantly remember?" Swamishri replied: "I remember Swami telling me, 'You have to come.' I spontaneously recall this moment."

Footnote 28: Almost two years older than Shantilal was his elder brother Nandulal. After being initiated as a sadhu by Shastriji Maharaj, he was named 'Harisevadas'. He stayed in Gondal in the service of Yogiji Maharaj. When Yogiji Maharaj underwent a hernia operation in Rajkot, he was in his service. Following this, he travelled with Yogiji Maharaj to Mumbai, where he met the sons of Manilal Vanik of Chansad. These brothers were trading in black hats. For some reason, Harisevadas went to them. After staying with them for a few days, he returned to his native village of Chansad back home and thereafter looked after the family farm. Referring to this, Shastriji Maharaj remarked: "My wish was for this little one [Shantilal], but he [Motibhai] gave me the older one! How could he possibly remain?"

A26: Sukh Tanā Hatā Din Te Gayā – Those Days of Enjoyment are now over... (pg 37-38)
[Leaving friends behind]

- Seeing Shantilal's readiness to leave in such a way, his friends were naturally shocked. More than the prospect of not getting the cricket equipment, they were devastated at the thought of Shantilal leaving them, never to return. Everyone's faces dropped with dampened enthusiasm. For a while, everyone was left speechless, no one able to utter even one word.
- Shortly after coming to their senses, his friends pleaded with him. "The letter may have come, but let's get the equipment. Let's play together for a few days before you go." His best friends emotionally begged to him: "Let's forget bringing any equipment, but you absolutely must stay." Another suggested: "Let's speak to your father to write to Shastriji Maharaj that Shantilal will come later."
- In this way, one request after another by his friends began to flow accompanied by tears. Calming down this flow of emotions, Shantilal remarked: "Swami's instructions have come, so I have to go. After all, Swami had told me that 'I want to make you a sadhu' and I had readily agreed." With these words, he handed over the responsibility of buying the equipment to Shankarlal.
- It soon dawned on everyone that Shantilal's decision was irreversible. Looking at him with tears in their eyes, they were enveloped with the feeling of '*Sukh tanā hatā din te gayā...*' – those days of enjoyment are now over. They were unable to move their hands, open their mouths, blink their eyes or even think. Witnessing a scene that it had never seen before, the outskirts of the village became silent. Yes, the village outskirts had experienced many heart-breaking scenes of its daughters leaving for their new marital homes; however, none could compare to the imminent departure of this dear son of Chansad. If the village outskirts could cry, the intensity of their crying would surely have made the earth and sky tremble today! The whole atmosphere froze with the agony of unspeakable pain. Such was the situation that all found themselves in when Shantilal left them to go to his house for what was to be the final time.

A27: Māngalik Mahāprasthān – Auspicious Renunciation (pg 38-39)

[Departure from home]

- One would have thought that the state of affairs at one's doorstep would have been even gloomier than the scene on the outskirts of the village. Naturally, the family members enjoyed a much closer relationship with Shantilal than did his friends. Here, however, the situation was very different. At Shantilal's house, one could sense the joy of parents raising their children and the auspicious atmosphere pervading the vicinity.
- In normal circumstances, who would not be overwhelmed or moved to tears with what was soon to happen? One's child was ready to renounce forever. The shining ornament was to disappear from one's home never to return. The name of the village would never be recited again through his lips. Not more than a few moments remained before the mother-father-brother-sister relationship was to end forever.
- *"Na chāpatyasamah snehah"* – There is no greater affection than what one has for one's children. Today, both father and mother had to break that bond of deep affection for good. Who would possibly be able to maintain patience at such a challenging time? Here, however, all were at ease.

The father was eager to obey the guru.

The mother was eager to serve the guru.

The son was eager to please the guru.

- Such a scenario would only be possible if one's guru was accepted as focal axis of one's life. The events unfolding at Shantilal's family home revealed to the whole world the unique traits special to the Swaminarayan Sampradaya – sacrifice, knowledge and dedication. Aso vad Ekadashi²⁹ – the final Ekadashi of the Samvat year of 1995 – was indeed fortunate. Why? Because out of the 24 Ekadashi days of the year, it had the great fortune to witness this rare and exceptional moment.
- The gentle mother who would later say, "I would survive on seeing my Shanti. I lived for Shanti alone..." This was the same mother who was now lovingly preparing warm milk for Shantilal to drink prior to his departure from home. Placing her hands on his head, she gave blessings: "You are now going. Make sure you please Shastriji Maharaj and do as he says."
- Father Motibhai also gave his blessings: "Never ever leave Shastriji Maharaj. Whatever grief comes your way, tolerate it. But please Shastriji Maharaj at any cost."

- Accepting this final lesson of love from his parents, Shantilal was now ready to take the steps of renouncing home, family, friends and village. To him, it was as casual as leaving for school, walking to the farm for a round or going out to play with his friends. Such was the ease and spontaneity of Shantilal mounting Ravjibhai's bicycle and gradually disappearing from the horizon of Chansad! Mother Earth was eager to experience the footprints of Shantilal one last time. Unfortunately, it was not to be. It was as if the land of Chansad was lamenting in pain. It must have been around 9.00am to 9.30am when time stopped on that day of farewell in Chansad.
- *Nakshatra-tārā-graha-sankulāpi jyotish-mati chandramasaiva rātrihi* |³⁰ – “Even though the night sky is full of constellations, stars and planets, it only remains illuminated due to the night moon.” Similarly, there were many individuals in Chansad. Out of those, the adornment of Chansad was Shantilal. Today that moon of Chansad was leaving for good. No wonder the village appeared lifeless! The streets were silent, the suburbs deserted, the villagers speechless!

Footnote 29: Tuesday 7 November 1939.

Footnote 30: Raghuvansham 6.22

A28: Āgnāmā ja Diwali – Diwali at the Guru’s Wish (pg 39-40)

[Renunciation sentiments]

- The timing of Shantilal’s departure was somewhat unusual. After all, the festival of Diwali was only four days away. It is but natural for all individuals to wish to celebrate Diwali at home with one’s family. Anyone going out for business, work, study or other reasons naturally looks forward to seeing the lamps of one’s house during Diwali. While others make their way home for Diwali, here was Shantilal doing the very opposite! What an extraordinary personality!
- Once Swamishri was asked: “Did it not occur to you to celebrate Diwali at home and then leave?”
- In response, Swamishri laughed and said with a smile: “We all say, ‘*Din Din Diwali*’ (every day is Diwali)! As it was Swami’s wish, isn’t Diwali included in that!”
- Swamishri’s response gives one a clear idea of his attitude at the time of his departure from home. How many individuals in this world would be able to renounce a happy home with such ease? No deep thinking! No contemplation! No emotional conflict! Shantilal’s break with worldly life seemed as easy as an elephant breaking a strand of raw thread.
- After taking his place on Ravjibhai’s bicycle, they had hardly crossed the village outskirts when Shantilal suddenly remembered that he had forgotten his daily puja kit. They reversed back home, where Shantilal quietly picked up his puja before immediately leaving again without as much as a moment’s hesitation!
- Years later, someone asked Swamishri: “Did you have any thoughts in your mind when leaving home?”
- “No. There was no question as there was no force involved,” he replied.
- It was a drastic moment of life-changing proportions! Yet Shantilal effortlessly took it in his stride with such ease!
- Commentators have noted that Gautam Buddha departed from home while his wife and son were sleeping to avoid heart-breaking scenes of parting. Shantilal, on the other hand, had no need for any such plan at the time of his departure. His renunciation was a calm and composed affair, not a time of anguish or sobbing.
- The likes of Bhartuhari left home on perceiving the whims of this world. Others like Mahavir Swami set out to attain the eternal. Here was Shantilal – the eternal Aksharbrahma – renouncing home to bestow eternal peace to the world! Such was

the magnitude of Shantilal's historical departure that it will continue to inspire countless for many years to come!

- Just as the waters of the river leave the lap of the mountain for the wider benefit of the people, Shantilal renounced the comforts of the lap of the village for the salvation of the people. Leaving one family, he was soon to make the whole world his family.

Amrutdhārā 2

Shastriji Maharajnā Sangmā – In the Company of Shastriji Maharaj

A29: Gurumilananā Mārge – On the Way to Meeting the Guru (pg 41-43) [Reaching Ahmedabad via Bochasan; vicharan with Nirgundas Swami]

- Renouncing his home and his village, Shantilal had only one goal – his guru Shastriji Maharaj. He was determined to reach him as soon as possible.
- His first stop on the way to meeting his guru was the village of Bhayli. From there, it seemed like a simple journey to Bochasan. The following day, on 8 November, he reached Sankarda with Ghanshyam Swami. They put up at the mandir. The New Year's Annakut offering was only three days away. The local devotees of the village lovingly urged the group of sadhus to celebrate Annakut in Sankarda. Ghanshyam Swami accepted the request of the devotees and agreed to stay. However, he told Shantilal: "After Diwali, we will be going to distribute the sanctified sweets from the Annakut offerings to the devotees. Therefore, you go to Bochasan and bring back some sanctified sweets." With these words, he sent Shankar Bhagat, who was serving in the mandir in Sankarda, to drop off Shantilal at Ranoli station.
- From there, Shantilal reached Bochasan where he met Nirgundas Swami. Shantilal explained to him the purpose for which he had come to Bochasan. Hearing this, Nirgundas Swami said: "I will write a note to Ghanshyam Swami. Ishwar Bhagat can take the sanctified sweets, but you stay here with me."
- It was evident that Nirgundas Swami was also drawn to and impressed by Shantilal. He suggested: "The festival of Kartik Ekadashi will soon take place in Ahmedabad. Shastriji Maharaj will reach there bringing sanctified sweets from Sarangpur. You can have his darshan there. So come with me." So saying, Nirgundas Swami decided to keep Shantilal with him.
- Realising that the darshan of his guru was not too far away, Shantilal's joy knew no bounds. He joined Nirgundas Swami in his *vicharan*. However, due to Nirgundas Swami's busy schedule dealing with the Sanstha's many administrative responsibilities, he was involved in holding meetings or meeting devotees in various places. His programme would be scheduled at the eleventh hour and would change unexpectedly. So even though the destination may be close distance wise, the time to reach there would be agonisingly long.
- Shantilal was in similar situation. It seemed like a simple trip from Bochasan to Ahmedabad via Nadiad. But due to government or court work, Nirgundas Swami had

to go to various places including Borsad and Bhadran. After a few days, they reached Nadiad by train.

- In Nadiad, Shantilal's health took a turn for the worse. Nirgundas Swami would leave early morning with Sadhu Harivallabhdas to complete various tasks, with no fixed time for returning. Back at his residence, Shantilal would be struggling with his high fever. He would constantly remember Shastriji Maharaj. Other sadhus and devotees would take care of him, but his condition was somewhat difficult to treat. He had lost all appetite for eating or drinking and was only able to take a small amount of hot milk boiled with pepper.
- He spent two or three days in this manner before departing from Nadiad. On the evening of 21 November (Kartik sud 10), Shantilal reached Ahmedabad. Shastriji Maharaj had already arrived earlier. The upper floor of Babubhai's house in Amblivali Pol served as everyone's accommodation. Due to his illness, Shantilal was in no state to talk or walk. As soon as he reached Ahmedabad, he was told to rest and go to sleep. Meanwhile, Nirgundas Swami sat with Shastriji Maharaj to update him on various activities of the Sanstha. In the course of their dialogue, Nirgundas Swami mentioned that Shantilal had come with him.
- As soon as he heard Shantilal's name, Shastriji Maharaj swiftly changed the conversation and started to ask: "Hmm? When did he come? Where is he?"
- Nirgundas Swami was somewhat surprised at Shastriji Maharaj enquiring about Shantilal with such affection and detail. In the past, he had experienced that however important the individual he was to meet, Shastriji Maharaj never betrayed any curiosity. Yet in this case, merely on the cursory mention of this apparently new teenager, Shastriji Maharaj was so full of eagerness and excitement!
- For a few moments, Nirgundas Swami was lost in thought. He explained: "He had come to Bochasan. So I brought him with me. Because he has developed a fever, he is resting."
- Hearing this news of Shantilal, Shastriji Maharaj immediately got up and went to where Shantilal was sleeping. As per his usual tendency, while chanting the dhun, Shastriji Maharaj gently started to stroke Shantilal's body and blessed him: "There is a fever, but it will now subside."
- Merely at this darshan and touch of Shastriji Maharaj, Shantilal felt much at ease and soon fell asleep.

**A30 – Pārshadi Dikshāno Punit Prasang – The Sacred Occasion of Parshadi Diksha
(pg 43-44)
[Parshad Diksha in Ahmedabad]**

- The following day, it happened exactly as Shastriji Maharaj had said. That morning, Shantilal’s body revealed no sign of any fever. He also felt much better and fresher. After his bathing and puja rituals, he went to Shastriji Maharaj. After doing darshan and offering prostrations, he was told by Shastriji Maharaj: “We want to initiate you as a parshad.”

“When?”

“Right now.”

“Good.”

- In this way, through merely a handful of syllables, a decision of great proportions was taken! Where there is an abundance of harmony, no words are required.
- It must have been between 9.00am and 10.00am that morning. Shastriji Maharaj placed a white *gatariyu* – an unstitched piece of cloth – on Shantilal’s upper body. For some time, Shantilal had already been wearing a white *dhoti*. Through this simple ceremony, Shastriji Maharaj transformed Shantilal into a *parshad* – a novice who wears white clothes prior to final initiation as a sadhu in saffron – and gave him the new name of ‘Shanti Bhagat’.
- The guru gave blessings and guidance to the young disciple. “You will gain much strength. Now you are to live as a renunciant. Follow the vow of celibacy and don’t keep money. You will earn the pleasure of God.”³¹
- On that auspicious Wednesday morning of Prabodhini Ekadashi on Kartik sud Ekadashi, Samvat 1996 – 22 November 1939 – no special programme had been arranged, no crowds had gathered, no mantras had been chanted and no drums had been played. Yet that day in Ahmedabad was to mark the beginning of a new era.
- The changing of a season does not have to be heralded by the calling of a cuckoo. The end of the night does not have to be signified by the calling of a rooster. Diwali does not necessarily come only when lamps are lighted. The changing of seasons is not at the mercy of the cuckoo’s call, nor is sunrise ever dependent on the calling of a rooster. And Diwali comes regardless of the lighting of lamps.

- In the same way, great events of significance do not necessarily happen only when drums rumble, crowds erupt or chants are shouted. Such events unfold in their own time. The impact of those tolling bells continues to ring for ages to come. True to his name and nature, Shanti Bhagat quietly entered the path of a renunciant in the Swaminarayan Sampradaya. No fuss, no commotion, no announcement – much like a river silently merging into the ocean.³³

Footnote 31: Because that day was Ekadashi – a day of fasting – with the following day being the day of *parna*, the day of breaking the fast, Shanti Bhagat did not have a fully shaved head while taking initiation. As shaving or cutting hair is not permitted on days of fasting or days of breaking the fast, his head was shaved two days later on the day of *sud teras*.

Footnote 32: Wednesday 22 November 1939

Footnote 33: QR code of video track 3. Pramukh Swami Maharaj talking about his departure from home and historical initiation as a *parshad*.

A31: Javābdārithi Sabhān – Understanding Responsibility (pg 44-45)

[Seva in Bochasan]

- Three days following Shanti Bhagat’s initiation, Shastriji Maharaj took him to Bochasan for the auspicious festival of Kartiki Punam. At that time, next to the brick oven that prepared the lime, foundations for a new building had been dug on the land around Bochasan Mandir. Shastriji Maharaj entrusted the service of filling those foundations to the devotees. Around 25 devotees were involved in this work, one of them being Shanti Bhagat. After completing the morning discourses, Shastriji Maharaj came there to sit and watch the work. Naturally, this motivated all those present to carry out this service.
- After a short while, Shastriji Maharaj got up from there to attend to some other work. Soon after his departure, it was a case of ‘*Guru Gayā Gokal Ne Vānse Thai Mokal.*’ Those involved in the work of filling the foundations started to disappear one by one. While all this happened right in front of young Shanti Bhagat’s eyes, he still continued to faithfully complete the assigned service with the same passion and dedication.
- ‘Maturity is the ability to do a job whether or not you are supervised.’³⁴ Whether others see us or not, fulfilling one’s assigned responsibility is the measurement of true maturity. This maturity was evident in Shantilal from the very beginning, and he was not one to follow the crowd. Shastriji Maharaj became very happy on seeing Shantilal’s perseverance in performing this service and gave him his heartiest blessings.³⁵

Footnote 34: Ann Landers (journalist).

Footnote 35: Many years after this event, on 18 July 1982, youths in Vidyanagar asked Swamishri: “Please narrate one incident in which Shastriji Maharaj was extremely pleased on you.” In response, Swamishri narrated the above incident.

A32: Sanskrit-shikshānā Shri Ganesh – The Beginnings of Sanskrit Studies (pg 45)

[Start of studies in Bhadran]

- Soon after celebrating the festival of Kartiki Punam in Bochasan, Shastriji Maharaj instructed Shanti Bhagat to study Sanskrit. Shastriji Maharaj arranged for Shanti Bhagat to study Sanskrit with Aksharjivandas, Purushottamanand Brahmachari and Hariswarupdas in the town of Bhadran, close to Bochasan. Before the group left for Bhadran, Shastriji Maharaj himself taught the basics of the texts of Shabda-rupavali and Margopadeshika to Shanti Bhagat in Bochasan, thus formally marking the beginning of his Sanskrit education. At the behest of the guru, the group of sadhus soon reached Bhadran.
- In Bhadran, the sadhus were resident in the mandir, where Shastriji Maharaj and Yogiji Maharaj had often stayed during their *vicharan*. A devotee by the name of Gelbhai looked after the affairs of the mandir. In Bhadran, there was a school affiliated to the Bhadrakali Mandir. A teacher from this school, Vitthalram Shastri used to come to teach the sadhus.