

Chapter 18

A Call to Contribute to the Gadhada Mandir Construction

Swamishri arrived in Atladara at 12:30 a.m. on 18 January 1953 (Maha *sud* 4, V.S. 2009), where he was greeted by a large crowd of devotees though it was past midnight. On 19 January 1953, after Thakorji's *arti* on Vasant Panchami morning, Swamishri sat in the *mahapuja*. Numerous devotees who had come for the festival had already taken their spots in the assembly. The fact that Swamishri himself was going to perform the *mahapuja* was a big draw for the devotees. Swamishri would become wholly absorbed in the devotional worship offered through the various rituals of the *mahapuja*. Moreover, when he recited the mantras in his baritone voice, engrossed in pleasing Maharaj and Swami, the entire atmosphere became divine. Swamishri would take the names of every devotee seated in the

mahapuja and chant the *dhun* that God may grant their auspicious wishes. Truly, that experience was extraordinary! Whenever Swamishri spoke a particular devotee's name, that devotee would believe it to be his supremely great fortune and experience otherworldly joy. Such was the enchantment of his speech. A singular voice arose from everyone's heart, "Oh! Bapa spoke my name. That is a great attainment. It is my great fortune!" Everyone experienced a divine exhilaration at this association with Brahman. All the devotees developed firm ties with Swamishri and Satsang through such memorable occasions.

After the *mahapuja*, Mota Swami spoke in the assembly. Then, Swamishri addressed the audience: "The sadhus and devotees should follow dharma in the form of the five *vartmans* and offer their service and devotion with an understanding of God's glory. Shastriji Maharaj is present in Satsang before our very eyes. Cultivate a pure character and understand the

glory of those who have come into contact with Swami. Eliminate jealousy and hatred and, maintaining completely pure sentiments, associate with the Sant.”

After the speeches of Pramukh Swami and Khengarjibhai, Rasikbhai read aloud an enthusiastic letter from Harmanbhai of Africa. In the letter, Harmanbhai exhorted everyone to help complete the Gadhada mandir as fast as possible, while gently admonishing the devotees from India, including Champakbhai Sheth, Mathurbhai Makandas, Manilal Saladvala, Ishwarbhai Prabhudas, Hirakaka, Motibhai Bhagwandas, Harshadbhai, and others for not doing enough. The inspirational letter galvanized the entire assembly to do anything to complete the Gadhada mandir.

Although in India, everyone was already actively engaged in fulfilling Shastriji Maharaj’s final wish of completing the Gadhada mandir. Currently, Swamishri and the sadhus traveled day and night through the villages visiting devotees’ homes, collecting funds, and

otherwise wholly focused on giving impetus to the Gadhada mandir construction project. Swamishri kept a grueling schedule without giving the slightest thought to the needs of his body. His singular goal was to inspire even more contributions so that the construction work could be completed earlier.

When the festival concluded in the evening, many devotees traveled to the newly built Atladara station to catch a train home. Swamishri and the sadhus walked to the station with the devotees while singing *dhun* and bhajans. Just a few days before, with the help of T.D.S. Bhogilal Trivedi, Ravjibhai, and other officers, and the tireless efforts of Ambalal B. Patel, Mota Swami had inaugurated the newly constructed Atladara flag station.¹ At everyone's request, Swamishri had come there to sanctify the station. While they waited for the train to arrive at the station, the devotees sat surrounding Swamishri as he recited some Swamini Vato in an impromptu assembly. Wherever Swamishri was, whether he was

seated, standing, or engaged in any activity, a crowd of devotees would always be there with him. On such occasions, Swamishri would invariably speak briefly on some spiritual teaching. He would leave everyone with some words of wisdom to take with them. Such was his irrepressible enthusiasm! Finally, the train arrived. Swamishri garlanded the train driver and gave him some prasad. He showered flowers upon the locomotive and said, “Jay Train! It has now become sanctified.” Then, Swamishri blessed all the railway officers present.

On this occasion, Shankarbhai Pujabhai and Prabhudas Nathalal had come from Africa to visit their native village of Kaloli. When they heard that Swamishri was in Atladara, they sent Natubhai and Kantibhai to invite Swamishri to grace their village.

Thus, Swamishri visited Kaloli that evening. He stayed at the house of Chaturbhai Shivabhai Patel, and delighted everyone in the evening

assembly with his extraordinary spiritual discourses.

Natubhai was working as an engineer in the village of Mandavi in the Surat district. However, he wished to migrate to America. He asked Swamishri, “Bapa, should I go to America or not?”

Swamishri said, “You should go. On your sixteenth day there, you will get a job. Uncle Sam (the government) is just sitting there awaiting your arrival.”

Swamishri continued, “When are you planning to leave?”

Natubhai said, “Bapa, there is a flight leaving on the 20th and another leaving on the 25th.”

Swamishri said, “Don’t go on the first plane. Go on the second plane after meeting all of your relatives.”

Natubhai accepted Swamishri’s command.

Swamishri offered him *vartman* and put a *kanthi* around his neck. He instructed him not to consume liquor or meat. Then he said, “Every day, turn five *malas* while chanting the Swaminarayan mantra.” Swamishri raised his hand and demonstrated how to turn the *mala* in his typical style.

A few days later, Natubhai saw the news in the newspaper that the flight going to America on the 20th had crashed, and everyone on board had died. When the people of Natubhai’s village read this, they all began to tell Natubhai, “Swamishri is clearly omniscient. Otherwise, how could he have warned you in advance.” Thus, everyone began to praise Swamishri.

Natubhai also developed a deeper connection with Swamishri. He developed the firm conviction in his mind that “Whatever Swamishri says holds the authority of the Vedas.”

He boarded the flight on the 25th and traveled to America. Just as Swamishri had said, he immediately was offered a job.

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1 A flag station is a small railroad station where trains stop only when a flag is displayed or passengers are to be discharged.