

Chapter 25

The First Murti-Pratishtha of Akshar Purushottam Maharaj in Africa

On the auspicious day of Monday, 25 April 1955 (Vaishakh *sud* 3, V.S. 2011—Akha Trij), the *murtis* were transported from the Patel Samaj to the mandir. Here, Jatashankar Shukal and other learned Brahmins guided the Vedic rituals of the *murtis'* *pran pratishtha*. The *murtis'* *anavaran* rites were guided by Tribhovandas Mulji of Kampala.

Then, Swamishri performed the *nyasvidhi* of invocation and the *netra-anavaran* rite of opening the *murtis'* eyes, thus completing the *pran-pratishtha* of the *murtis*. Thousands of devotees celebrated this grand *pratishtha* ceremony with deafening *jay naads* and thunderous applause. Today was a historic occasion since, for the first time outside of India, across the ocean on the vast continent of

Africa, Swamishri had consecrated the sacred images of Akshar Purushottam Maharaj to propagate the eternal *upasana* of becoming Aksharrup and worshipping Purushottam. This land, colloquially known as “the dark continent,” had today truly become enlightened.

After the *murtis* were offered *thal* and puja, the first *arti* of the *murtis* was performed by Manibhai M. Patel of Jinja, who subsequently pledged a large donation to the mandir.

Ranchhodbhai Patel of Kampala, Premjibhai of Mombasa, and others were the main sponsors seated in the *yagna*.

The final ceremony of raising the mandir flag was performed by Ishwarlal Prabhudas, Mota Swami’s former brother, who had come with the sadhus from India. The flags were unfurled amidst tremendous *jay naads*. Finally, the mandir inauguration ceremony was concluded at 5:30 p.m. with the first public *arti*.

Swamishri had blessed the devotees that it wouldn't rain during the inauguration ceremonies. But since it was the rainy season, everyone remained anxious about the weather despite Swamishri's blessings. However, people gained faith in Swamishri's words when not a single drop of rain fell throughout the entire three-day event, but five inches of rain poured down the day after it concluded.

On 27 April 1955, Swamishri visited the Rameshi Sugar Factory of Sheth Lakshmidas Madhvani. Swamishri walked through the entire complex, sanctifying it. He held an assembly in the school auditorium, in which Lakshmidasbhai and Kantibhai welcomed Swamishri. Countless factory workers and residents of Rameshi village had Swamishri's darshan. Countless African laborers at the factory experienced inner peace and joy at Swamishri's darshan. Everyone partook of the prasad that had been arranged here.

Back in the mandir, after *sandhya arti*, Swamishri gathered the children and led them

in the *dhun* of “*Swāmi ane Nārāyan, Akshar ane Purushottam...*” while pointing to the large *murtis* and introducing them to Maharaj and Swami. Swamishri would also have the children sing the kirtan, “*Dayālu Prabhu Akshar Purushottam...*”

On the night of 2 May 1955 (Vaishakh *sud* 11, V.S. 2011), Swamishri had told the assembled devotees at his accommodations, “Just as we have all come to this country to earn a living, not just to eat; similarly Maharaj has sent us from Akshardham to earn ultimate liberation. So, it won’t do for us to be passive in this. We must be bold and accomplish our mission.”

Swamishri read Vachanamrut Sarangpur 7 aloud and said, “The mind is such that it will transgress all limits. But the Sant is the Naimisharanya Kshetra. In his presence the *indriyas* will be blunted. What does it mean for the *indriyas* to be blunted? Imagine a person who has not eaten for three days sees a feast of *dudhpak* and puris that has been contaminated

with a snake’s venom. If someone said, ‘I will give you `5,000 if you take two swigs.’ Would anyone drink it? No one would. Similarly, when one attains the *rajipo* of the great Sant, the sharp cravings of the five *indriyas* are blunted. If someone curses at us, does that cause us to develop boils? Let him curse, his mouth will ache. That is an example of what occurs when the sharp focus of the hearing is blunted. We would believe ourselves to be the *atma* and *brahmarup*.”

In his discourses, Swamishri often told the devotees, “For what purpose have we come here? Not to be honored. We have come to cultivate *samp* and oneness. Traveling through the villages and delivering discourses, we should foster harmony. We should do that which would please Shastriji Maharaj. Since so many prominent devotees are sitting here, I am sharing this important principle. If you focus on this and please him, then we will be pleased with you ten-millionfold. Ranchhodbhai, do you understand what we would like you to do?”

Ranchhodbhai of Kampala replied, “The sense of I-ness and my-ness is unrelenting.”

Swamishri said, “Keep your focus on the main principle. And sacrificing what you have amassed for Gadhada is the principle! We don’t want your flowers, garlands, *dhotiyas*, or reverence, but we want you to grasp this opportunity to offer your service for Gadhada. Do you understand?

“Whether you are from Kampala or Jinja or anywhere, everyone should have a singular focus and a singular attachment. In that, we will be pleased. Do not spend an excessive amount offering rich foods. Because if we don’t complete the pending construction in Gadhada, everyone will say, ‘After Shastriji Maharaj departed, everything imploded for them.’ So, everyone should minimize all other expenses and remain focused on offering their financial contribution so that Shastriji Maharaj’s wish is fulfilled and he showers a torrent of blessings upon us. Shastriji Maharaj had resolved that the mandir in Gadhada should be completed.”

Meanwhile, as the prasad arrived, Swamishri said, “Look, this is a plate of prasad for Gadhada. It is raining pearls. Shastriji Maharaj had three principles: *samp*, *suhradbhav*, and *divyabhav* in the Sadhu...”

“We will write Shastriji Maharaj a letter.’ But then the question arose, ‘How will we send the letter to Swami?’” He explained, ‘We will inform Shastriji Maharaj that your dream has been fulfilled. So please grant your blessings.’ When we had gone to Mathura, one *bawa* was offering worship to the Yamuna River with a 25-kilogram *arti*. We want to offer *arti* in a similar fashion to the Ghela River. Swami has already completed the *murti-pratishtha* for us.

“Our time will be over tomorrow, but the *yuvak mandal* should stay strong. Because it is Swami’s wish, even if we must eat fewer *rotla* for two years, we should do so in order to fulfill his wish!”

While bathing on the morning of 5 May 1955, Swamishri said, “Today, at 4 a.m., sleep deserted me. Then I did bhajan for an hour,

and then at 5 a.m., I thought, ‘All right, let me go for a bath.’” After Swamishri returned from his bath, C.T. Patel awoke.

Seeing this, Swamishri said, “C.T. Bapa! By now, in Gondal we would be doing *arti* having already completed 100 *pradakshinas*.” In this way, Swamishri remembered Gondal Akshar Deri.

The next day, Swamishri visited the home of Purushottambhai of Palana. As the mandir could be seen from his house, Swamishri looked at the mandir, folded his hands and exclaimed, “Jay Mandir!”

From there, Swamishri came to the mandir and gave leave for Tribhovandas to return to Kampala. Swamishri gave him some flowers sanctified by Thakorji and said, “Aho, ho! Tribhovandasbhai granted us immense joy. Once you reach, send me a letter.”

During lunch that day, Swamishri said, “Today, the rains have gone to feast.”

One devotee had come from India. Swamishri asked him, “On your way here, was the steamer swaying in the seas?”

He replied, “I couldn’t feel any sway until we reached the shoreline, where it did begin to sway.”

Swamishri said, “Had we come on a steamer, this would have happened to us.”

Swamishri had wanted to travel by steamer, but at everyone’s insistence he had taken a plane. But due to severe turbulence, the flight had been bumpy and not to Swamishri’s liking.

Today, Swamishri visited the home of Babubhai Valand, where many Kutchis had gathered. Swamishri addressed them saying, “Maharaj has written that one should do darshan at a Shivalaya and other mandirs. So, everyone should go for darshan at this Swaminarayan mandir. We had gone to the Maninagar mandir on the occasion of Ramnavami.” Thus, Swamishri spoke extensively on the importance of unity.

Here, Swamishri had given solid answers to some questions that had been posed to him by the devotees.

“Who can be said to be connected [to God and guru]?”

Swamishri: “One who acts according to their wishes can be said to be connected to them. One who surrenders their mind to them can be said to be connected to them. You should endure whatever hardships you face in Satsang. The more hardships you face, the greater you will become.”

“What are these hardships?” Harmanbhai asked.

“If five devotees have come, you should welcome them and offer them all hospitality.” Moreover, Swamishri explained, “If you understand their glory, then you can endure hardship. You should serve the devotees of God as much as you can. Welcome them, continue offering them water. That is the sentiment of service. We are the followers of manifest God.

We should cultivate the inclination to serve others. Some should stay back to pick up and dispose of the used leaf dishes after meals. Without understanding this glory, one cannot experience happiness.”