

Chapter 21

Caring for the Devotees' Welfare

It invariably happened that in whatever location the previous day's weather had been frigid and potentially snowy, by the time special train reached there, the excessive cold had dissipated. Moreover, no one suffered any ill effects even after immersing themselves fully in the ice-cold holy rivers emerging directly from the Himalayan glaciers. Countless devotees experienced this divine protection. It was as if Swamishri had used his yogic powers to assume upon himself the debility, fever, and ill health of all the devotees! Otherwise, for Swamishri, who covered himself with a blanket even in the summer, who would take the utmost care that the smallest cracks in windows were sealed to prevent the outside air from coming in, who in the winter would don up to seven layers to stay warm—how could he sleep with the chilly drafts whistling straight through the numerous gaps

in the doors and windows of this dilapidated Indian Railways coach? The chill must have settled into his bones. Yet, ignoring and concealing the effects of all these hardships, Swamishri continued to portray an image of good health for the benefit of the devotees.

It was for the sake of devotees' welfare that Swamishri had decided to arrange this pilgrimage on a special train. Moreover, it was a testament to the divine, extraordinary regard the devotees had for Swamishri that they had all flocked to join this pilgrimage. Otherwise, in this season, no one would be willing to join in such a pilgrimage. With so many people crammed into a train, numerous hardships in bathing, eating, drinking, sleeping, sitting, and other basic necessities of life were to be expected. These physical hardships, compounded with the inevitable clash of personalities of so many people in such difficult situations, would surely have caused significant mental strife.

However, Swamishri's compartment was like the center of Akshardham, bathing everyone in constant rays of divinity and exerting a transformative effect on even the most irascible and ill-natured. He was like a mountainous magnet, constantly drawing everyone to him. Thus, devotees crowded Swamishri's compartment for his divine darshan, Thakorji's *artī*, and the whirlwind of discourses and kirtans that began with *prabhatiya* before the crack of dawn. The constant radiance of this embodiment of Brahman suppressed everyone's base natures and granted all the bliss of Akshardham on this pilgrimage.

Swamishri remained clear that his singular purpose behind organizing this pilgrimage and keeping everyone with him was to grant them the bliss and fulfillment of engaging in spiritual discourses, devotional hymns, darshan, and the remembrance of God and his teachings. During the pilgrimage, even Swamishri's silence spoke volumes. His every action became an extremely

effective lesson in eradicating the flaws of the soul. Thus, everyone accommodated each other's idiosyncrasies and, by following Swamishri's commands, behaved as the *atma*. Ultimately, the atmosphere remained suffused with divine glory and Brahman. Throughout the pilgrimage, Swamishri's discourses were focused on reinforcing this fundamental point. Everyone possessed spiritual knowledge and firm faith. The only thing remaining was to eradicate their body consciousness, which was the ultimate purpose of this pilgrimage.