

Chapter 22

Devotees Giddy for Darshan

Meanwhile in Gujarat, the sadhus and devotees of Sarangpur were overjoyed to receive a letter from Swamishri informing them of his impending arrival. The news spread throughout the surrounding villages. Devotees from Samadhiyala, Zamrala, Keriya, Khopala, Ningala, Turkha, Tajpur, and other villages gathered in Sarangpur. The crowds of devotees in Sarangpur were so large it seemed as if they had come to celebrate some grand festival. Everyone was wholly consumed by the singular anticipation of Swamishri's darshan. The *kothari* had hired a marching band to herald Swamishri's arrival.

Just then, a horse-drawn carriage entered the mandir. All the devotees enthusiastically hailed the *jay naad*, and the marching band began to play. But when the horse carriage stopped, only devotees disembarked from the

carriage. There seemed to have been some mistake. The newly arrived devotees explained, “Swamishri had to suddenly change his plans and travel to Mumbai to meet the African political leader, A.B. Patel.”

Everyone was deeply disappointed by this news. It was as if a thunderbolt had struck and annihilated their intense enthusiasm and anticipation of Swamishri’s darshan. Everyone was stunned.

In every city and town, everyone—male and female, young and old—thirsted for Swamishri’s darshan and yearned to have Swamishri visit their village and bless them with the bliss of his darshan and company. The same phenomenon was observed during festivals. Crowds of devotees would flock to the mandir from every village. There would be a massive press of devotees struggling to meet Swamishri. Invariably, the crowds of devotees would have to be restrained. Even though they would be pushed back to maintain some

semblance of order, they would continue jostling to get as close to Swamishri as possible.

In this way, after Shastriji Maharaj's passing to Akshardham, the devotees had become thoroughly enraptured with Swamishri. Whether it was one's house or farm, the *vastu* ceremony of some new construction, or a wedding, everyone was eager to invite Swamishri to sanctify these places and events with his presence. Swamishri visited innumerable homes in his travels through the villages, paying no heed to day or night. Swamishri's eating and sleeping times had thus become erratic. The constant requests from devotees would upend all prior plans and arrangements so that Swamishri's program would always be changing on the spot. In their overwhelming outpouring of affection, the devotees often lost sight of the need to maintain some discipline for the sake of Swamishri's health and instead made their loving demands of Swamishri as if he were public property. Even with his body weakened

by a lifetime of fasts, austerities, and *vairagya* such that it had very little stamina remaining to bear such burdens, Swamishri continued to travel from village to village through every corner of Gujarat, believing it to be his devotion to please every devotee—young or old, rich or poor, rustic or urbane.

Compassionate Swamishri thought that all the sadhus and devotees must be waiting for me in Sarangpur. These prominent devotees pulled me to Mumbai, but the loving devotees of the villages must have been disappointed. Thus, he wrote letters to all the villages remembering all the devotees' names and consoling them, "I will definitely come to Sarangpur after celebrating the festival of Vasant Panchami in Atladara."

Swamishri forever felt that if the smallest devotee had been displeased, Shriji Maharaj himself had been displeased.

After departing from Mumbai, Swamishri and Balmukund Swami arrived in Vadodara on 13 January 1954. The mahant and sadhus of the

Swaminarayan Mandir in Wadi welcomed Swamishri, and Swamishri did darshan in the mandir. Then Swamishri traveled to Bhatwada for the inauguration of a *jnan* mandir. When Swamishri arrived, he was welcomed with the festive tunes of a band. The *jnan* mandir and the entire street was festively decorated. Many devotees had come from the surrounding areas. Deputy Collector Pradyumnasinh and the mahant and sadhus of the Vartal diocese mandir were also present. Harmanbhai gave a speech calling upon the youth to strive for the propagation of Satsang together with the maintenance of good moral character, the observance of the Shikshapatri, and the fostering of mutual affection. Swamishri spoke on the glory of satsang. Bhadarva Thakor, Rajpur Darbar, and others came for Swamishri's darshan in the evening.

From here, Swamishri planned to travel by train to Ahmedabad via Nadiad. With great devotion, Krishnabhai's wife had made papad

with watermelon juice for Swamishri. She gave it to Krishnabhai to take to the railway station.

Krishnabhai arrived at the station. As the train rolled in, the entire station reverberated with the *jay naad*. Krishnabhai came forward and gave the papad and several other items to Swamishri. Many other devotees had offered Swamishri many items, but Swamishri picked out the small package of papad and touched it reverently to his head as a mark of his favor. Upon returning home, Krishnabhai described Swamishri's action to his wife. With tears of joy, she declared, "Swamishri accepted my devotion and fulfilled my wishes!"

The train arrived in Ahmedabad at night. Yogiji Maharaj presided over an assembly in which Deputy Collector Gohil Saheb, Sanand Administrative Officer Dave, and others were present.

The devotees of Ahmedabad, including Champakbhai, Vinayakravbhai, and others, requested Swamishri to remain in Ahmedabad for Uttarayan, explaining, "This year, Pramukh

Swami and Mota Swami are in Khandesh. Thus they will not be present on this occasion in Ahmedabad. So, please celebrate this festival with us this year.” Forever beholden to his devotees, Swamishri immediately agreed to their request.

The next day, the Uttarayan assembly was to be held upon the Mistry Terrace. Swamishri first went for darshan at the Kalupur mandir and then at Ambli Vali Pol. At 4 p.m., Swamishri arrived at the hostel on Kankaria Road run by the Kutch-Saurashtra Mochi Gnati Development Mandal. A large canopy had been erected for Swamishri’s assembly there. Speaking to the assembled students, Swamishri emphasized the need to provide the youth with moral and spiritual instruction. Devshibhai, Govardhanbhai, and other devotees had been instrumental in organizing the event.

That night, Swamishri took the train to Rajkot where he arrived on 15 January 1954. An assembly was held at the memorial shrine of Krishnaji Ada. Swamishri led devotees in the

dhun and prayer for Karsandas Ganatra, who had passed away at a young age. Swamishri consoled Lakshmidas Ganatra and his relatives and blessed the assembly. Swamishri's blessings eased everyone's grief.