

Chapter 21

In Kashi, the Pilgrimage's Most Joyful Occasion

According to the routine, the morning assembly was organized on the railway platform in Kashi. The assembly turned out to be extraordinary. Out of his limitless compassion, Swamishri openly revealed several fundamental principles in his discourse:

“If one serves humbly, the ego dissolves, and if one understands the glory of God's devotee, jealousy is eradicated. One should vigilantly stand guard at the gateway to one's mind to prevent the entry of negative influences. One should keep the company of the spiritually highest souls. Without manifest God, just chanting his name does not fulfill our spiritual goals. The holy name of God is the flower, and manifest God is the fruit. Everyone chants God's name, but its fruit lies in chanting his name while remembering the form of God

embodied before you. Only when such conviction is realized in the *indriyas*, *antahkaran*, and experience can one be called a complete *jnani*. Only one through whom God constantly manifests is the Sant, whereas others are like gypsum crystals. Gypsum crystals and sugar crystals look the same, but experience teaches us that they taste very different. According to Vachanamrut Gadhada I 27, God is constantly and completely manifest within the Sant. Thus, only when one comes into contact with God and the Sant, and one develops complete faith and affection for them, can one be said to have chanted God's name with the realization of God's form.

“No matter how many spiritual endeavors we perform, only if we remain attached to God and the Sant do we obtain the benefit of those spiritual endeavors and attain *ekantik dharma*. We travel to places of pilgrimage to obtain the fruits of pilgrimage. Similarly, if we wish to travel to Akshardham, we must forsake our base natures. One should understand and

surmount the following five challenges: understand *upasana*; recognize the true Sadhu; eradicate desires for even the best sense pleasures; realize the body and the atman to be distinct; and, hardest of all, understand another's glory while staying together with them.

“So, one should continue to reminisce on the bliss one has received in this pilgrimage, but one should not ruminate over any hardships that may have befallen one. One should learn to make do with whatever is available in any situation. One should learn to see and imbibe the virtues of others. The joy that one gains from that is not available in anything else. Now, for the next eight days, resolve to experience such bliss as if you are sitting in Akshardham itself. All these compartments have become *nirgun*, transcendent of *maya*, due to the contact of God and the Sant. According to Vachanamrut Gadhada I 71, one should not perceive any *maya* in it and thus remain happy.

“Only one who has a profound love for Maharaj and the great Sant can maintain one’s satsang. But without such love, one’s satsang is not fostered. One who has developed complete love for God and the Sant is able to practice satsang as it should be practiced while concealing one’s own greatness. He would not become wayward or speak impetuously. Look at how Swami Shastriji Maharaj maintained satsang! Similarly, Gopalanand Swami, Gunatitanand Swami, and others concealed their powers. To practice satsang as it should be practiced means to recognize the Satpurush as he is and attain oneness with him.”

Thus, Swamishri delivered such extraordinary discourses on the railway platform. Everyone experienced this to be the most joyful part of the entire pilgrimage. Upon conclusion of the assembly, everyone set off for darshan of the holy spots around Kashi.

The following morning, all the pilgrims went to the Kashi Vishwanath Mandir for darshan, and then bathed in the holy Ganga River at

Manikarnika Ghat. Then, everyone gathered in the courtyard next to the Vishwanath Mandir. From there, at 10 a.m., everyone walked in a procession, singing *dhun* and kirtans to the accompaniment of a band, as the mahant and sadhus of the local Swaminarayan mandir led everyone to the mandir. Everyone reached the mandir at 11:30 a.m., and Swamishri performed the *rajbhog arti*. Local sadhu and accomplished singer Bhaktijivan Swami reverently declared, “Today, the true installation ceremony of the *murtis* has been performed!”

Following the *arti*, the devotees hailed the *jay naad*. The mandir's mahant, Shastri Shwetvaikunthdasji, Swami Bhaktijivandasji, and other sadhus and devotees welcomed Swamishri with great affection. Shwetvaikunth Swami had a profound reverence for Swamishri, and so he behaved as if Swamishri were his own relative and guru. In the assembly that followed, erudite pandits of Kashi recited

prayers and *stuti* of the Vedas and offered their devotion to Swamishri.

Then Swamishri went with the sadhus and devotees to Gau Ghat, which is adjacent to the mandir. Swamishri bathed Harikrishna Maharaj and sprinkled the sanctified water upon the heads of all the sadhus and devotees. Then, everyone took a bath in the Ganga River. After this, the devotees offered puja to Swamishri, and Swamishri recited some Swamini Vato before concluding the assembly.

In the evening, Swamishri visited the homes of Dahyabhai and other devotees in Kashi. Then Swamishri returned to the Swaminarayan mandir before arriving at the train station. The local Swaminarayan sadhus came to the station to see Swamishri off. The train left from Kashi and headed to Gaya.