

Chapter 16

Pilgrimage to Mahuva

On the way to Mahuva, Hirjibhai Sheth welcomed Swamishri in the village of Talaja. He had Swamishri sanctify his house and his oil mill, and he offered Swamishri and the group of sadhus and devotees snacks and hot, spiced milk. Hirjibhai's sons, Daudbhai and Sultanbhai, were also involved in serving Swamishri and the group. The local devotees also gathered for Swamishri's darshan.

Swamishri left Talaja at 9 a.m. and reached Bhadrod after traversing about 40 miles of wagon trails. Here they did darshan of the sacred place where the young Sadhu Yagnapurushdas had applied sandalwood paste to Bhagatji Maharaj and then embraced him. Then, they continued on their way to Mahuva.

Even as they approached the town of Mahuva from afar, the sight of its coconut trees and lush gardens full of flowers and fruit trees

elicited a sense of delight amongst the group. Before entering the town, the group stopped for a bath at the sanctified Malan River. Then, singing kirtans, they reached the birthplace of Bhagatji Maharaj.

In Swamishri's presence, spiritual discourses and kirtans were continuous. Whether traveling by train or car, in a procession, or simply walking from one place to another, Swamishri insisted on an unbroken focus on God through bhajans. When sanctifying devotees' homes, he would invariably have everyone sing bhajans while walking from one house to the next.

Everyone's accommodations were in Bhagatji Maharaj's birthplace itself. Swamishri felt this to be a special treat. When Swamishri went to a pilgrimage place, he would repeatedly do darshan with great devotion and childlike eagerness, finding it hard to leave. And here, he was getting the opportunity to stay in this holiest of places. His joy knew no bounds!

Swamishri went for darshan at all the sanctified spots where Bhagatji Maharaj used to sit, sleep, eat, bathe, and hold spiritual assemblies. Then, he visited the *hari mandir* where Bhagatji Maharaj had dug the foundations. In the assembly hall, Mota Swami showed everyone where Bhagatji Maharaj used to sit. Then Swamishri visited the homes of Mohanbhai, Bhagwanbhai, Nagardas Vakil, and other devotees before arriving at the house of Himmatbhai Mamlatdar Saheb. Swamishri and the group ate lunch here and then went to the banks of the Malan River. When they reached Bhagatji Maharaj's cremation site, Swamishri became emotional. He performed ten *dandvats*, did *dhun*, and made a wish that a beautiful covered memorial with Maharaj's holy footprints would be constructed here.

After departing Mahuva in the afternoon, Swamishri again met Hirjibhai Sheth in Talaja before continuing onwards, singing bhajans in the back of a small open truck. Ambashankar of Botad sang some beautiful bhajans to

everyone's delight. Babubhai Kothari also pleased everyone with his humorous spiritual discourses. Mota Swami narrated incidents from his early days with Shastriji Maharaj. They stopped about 20 miles from Bhavnagar to have a snack that Kuberbhai had packed for them. Since evening had fallen, Swamishri served everyone repeatedly, insisting that they eat.

This enthusiasm for serving and feeding everyone was one of Swamishri's hallmarks. However, on the pretext of serving others, he would neglect to eat himself. Swamishri would delight everyone by serving them so much food that no one would even notice whether Swamishri had eaten. On countless occasions, Swamishri would experience joy from bringing joy to others, but casually, without any pretense, he would maintain his inclination and vow of not eating while traveling.

The group reached Bhavnagar at 11 p.m. After sharing their experiences of the

pilgrimage to Mahuva with the local devotees, Swamishri went to sleep at 1 a.m.

The following day, Swamishri sanctified the home of Collector Rameshbhai Saheb. Then, Swamishri sanctified Kuberbhai's timber stores. All the devotees in Kuberbhai's family offered their sincere service to Swamishri and the sadhus. From here, everyone went to the train station to go to Palitana.

At the invitation of Chunibhai and Hariprasad Mistry, who was serving in the Gadhada mandir construction, Swamishri and the sadhus arrived at Palitana Station on the evening of 24 September 1951. The local devotees had gathered with flower garlands to welcome Swamishri. Then, everyone went to the schoolhouse where accommodations had been arranged. Swamishri and the sadhus conducted spiritual discourses until late at night. The next day, Swamishri sanctified the homes of Labhshankar Nagardas, Lakshmishankar Sompura, Himmatbhai, and other devotees. In the afternoon, Swamishri

and the sadhus had lunch at the bungalow of Mangalsinhjibhai Darbar and Jitendra Basaheb of Panchala. In the evening, Swamishri had a bath at the farm of Jethabhai Mali. Then Swamishri went for darshan at the Swaminarayan Mandir of the Vartal diocese. The mandir's *kothari*, Popatlalbai, Ravbahadur Lallubhai, and other senior devotees of the town insisted that Swamishri make his accommodations in the mandir. Swamishri promised, "We will do so and please you in the future."