

Chapter 25

First Foreign Tour

At 7 p.m. on Wednesday, 13 April 1955 (Chaitra *vad* 6, V.S. 2011), Pramukh Swami (Shastri Narayanswarupdasji), together with a large group of devotees, had gathered at the mandir to see Swamishri, Mota Swami, Ishwarbhai Daji, and the others who were traveling to Africa off to the airport. After the reception by a marching band and the exchange of flower garlands, Swamishri and his group sat in a set of cars that had been decorated with garlands of fragrant flowers. They reached the airport at 8 p.m. A large group of approximately 2,000 devotees had gathered at the airport for their beloved guru's sendoff.

Together with Swamishri, the devotees at the airport did *dhun*, kirtan, and *cheshta* and listened to some spiritual discourses while gazing upon Swamishri's *murti* with rapt

attention. Finally, Swamishri offered his blessings to the assembled devotees.

Swamishri and his entourage boarded the airplane at 9:45 p.m., and the devotees did darshan until the plane took off at 10 p.m. The airport officials were astonished by this divine sendoff, and they remarked that while many renowned dignitaries leave from this airport, they had never seen anyone receive this kind of sendoff.

Swamishri had instructed all *satsangis* around India, “Until we return from Africa everyone should abide by the following commands: (1) memorize Vachanamruts Gadhada II 28 and Gadhada III 2, (2) memorize 10 Swamini Vato, (3) memorize the *ashtak* ‘Anant Koti’ and the *prarthana*, (4) memorize the *cheshta*, (5) attend every Sunday *sabha* without fail, (6) memorize two kirtans, (7) turn five extra *malas* for the success of our foreign trip...” Everyone resolved to follow Swamishri’s commands.

On the way from Mumbai to Nairobi, the plane had a stopover in Aden. Swamishri met with the devotees and Indian community members in Aden. The devotees in Aden requested Swamishri to stop over in Aden for some time, but that was not possible.

The flight was scheduled to arrive in Nairobi at 11 a.m., but due to rain, the flight reached Nairobi at 1:30 p.m. A massive crowd of devotees had gathered to welcome Swamishri. After huddling in the cold rain for four hours, all the devotees were overjoyed to have Swamishri's darshan as he arrived from India. They greeted Swamishri with loud and enthusiastic *jay naads*. Many devotees welcomed Swamishri with flower garlands. Member of the Ugandan Legislative Council and noted industrialist C.K. Patel welcomed Swamishri at the airport and received Swamishri's blessings. He had helped in securing the plot of land for the Kampala mandir. He often said, "In this country, we should have only one religion—the

Swaminarayan faith. Their unity and pure character have an unparalleled impact on people, which I have personally experienced.”

By 8 a.m. that morning, Swamishri had observed a waterless fast for thirty-six hours due to his air travel.

At 2:30 p.m., Swamishri, Mota Swami, and the rest of the group reached the Swaminarayan mandir on Temple Road. After Thakorji’s darshan, Swamishri had a bath and completed his puja rituals by 5 p.m. Then, Swamishri came to the assembly, following which he performed the *arti* of the *murtis* that Shastriji Maharaj had sent, having performed their *arti* in India. The assembly lasted until 11 p.m.

Since in Nairobi, most employees had to report to work from 8 a.m., on 16 April 1955, Swamishri presided in a satsang assembly from 6 a.m. until 7:45 a.m. Then, the devotees took Swamishri and the sadhus for darshan at the various Hindu temples in Nairobi. Thereafter, they took Swamishri to the Ondiri Swamp near

Kikuyu, which was locally appreciated for its natural beauty. Swamishri did *dhun* here.

Then, Swamishri traveled seven miles to the government's agricultural research offices in Muguga to sanctify the residence of Dhulabhai of Vaso. By noon, Swamishri returned to his accommodations. There, he met with Jethabhai Patel of Karamsad, who was currently an elected representative on the Legislative Council of Kenya. The prominent Nairobi businessman Shri Kanji Naranji had also come for Swamishri's darshan.

That evening, Swamishri departed from Nairobi by train to go to Mombasa.