

# Chapter 21

## Concluding the Pilgrimage with the Affectionate Offerings of Surat

When the train arrived at Surat Station, Swamishri and the pilgrims were welcomed by Maganbhai, Ashabhai, Tribhovandas Kapadiya, Mashalji Sheth, and other devotees. A long procession of cars, bullock carts, and pilgrims on foot, all singing *dhun* and bhajans traveled from the train station to the Swaminarayan mandir. The local sadhus lovingly welcomed Swamishri. After having Thakorji's darshan, Swamishri held an assembly in the assembly hall. Gulabbhai, a prominent senior devotee, spoke affectionately about the glory of the true Sant, unity within Satsang, and the importance of broad-mindedness. Then he performed puja of Swamishri and the sadhus. Harmanbhai offered a vote of thanks and recalled the connection that Shastriji Maharaj had with this mandir. In this very mandir, Shastriji Maharaj

had met Bhagatji Maharaj for the first time. It was the first time that he had been made aware of the principles of Akshar Purushottam *upasana* and the importance of propagating the same. After remembering these old incidents, everyone went to the house of Ardesar Kotwal and had darshan of the *pagh* that Maharaj had gifted to him.

In the community plot where they were staying, the devotees of Surat served the pilgrims a grand feast of Surat-style *dudhpak* and *ghari*. When the plan had originally been made to have the special train halt in Surat, Maganbhai and Surat's devotees had asked Swamishri what kind of food they should prepare, as they wished to please all the pilgrims. Swamishri had enthusiastically responded, "*Dudhpak puri!*"

Swamishri had great enthusiasm for feeding Thakorji and the devotees the best foods. Although he would not be consuming even a crumb of such rich foods, believing the devotees' joy to be his own, Swamishri took

great care to please the devotees in every way. Swamishri would often describe in exquisite detail the extraordinary Surat-style *dudhpak* that Shastriji Maharaj used to make. He would never tire of singing the praises of Shastriji Maharaj's expertise in cooking. Whenever Swamishri traveled to Surat, he would enthusiastically have Surat-style *dudhpak* and many other special items made to feed Thakorji and the sadhus and devotees with him. Although he would refrain from indulging in such rich foods, he would lovingly insist on feeding others. Seeing such extraordinary *vairagya* in Swamishri, the devotees could not help but bow their heads in reverence.

From Surat, the train went to Vadodara, and, at 11 a.m. on Thursday, 18 December 1953, it arrived in Bocharan.

Here, the pilgrimage concluded. Thousands of devotees had gathered for Swamishri's darshan. Everyone welcomed Swamishri and the pilgrims at the train station. They brought everyone to the mandir in a festive procession,

singing *dhun* and bhajans accompanied by musical instruments. A large assembly was held in the evening, during which Mota Swami and Harmanbhai gave a report on the pilgrimage. Swamishri gave his blessings. The holy water from the Triveni Sangam was distributed to all. Swamishri declared, “This is divine nectar. Whoever had not come on the pilgrimage will receive the benefit of the pilgrimage by drinking this holy water.”

Then, all the devotees dispersed, reminiscing on the reception in Chhapaiya, Swamishri’s birthday celebrations in Mumbai, the grand processions in Kashi and Surat, and all the occasions when Swamishri had granted the bliss of his divine darshan and *samagam*.

Around this time, Fulabhai Hargovinddas Mistry of Sisva had crafted cabinets for the mandir. Kothari Swami had asked Swamishri to bless him for his good work.

Swamishri had darshan in the mandir and entered the assembly hall, where he spotted Fulabhai. Swamishri walked over to him and

blessed him, saying, “You have made cabinets of excellent quality. Kothari Swami will pay you for your efforts. From that, offer one month of your wages as *mahapuja* in Akshar Deri.”

“Certainly, Bapa!” Then, Fulabhai became emotional, so Swamishri asked someone to get some water and gave it to him. When Fulabhai was able to speak again, he said, “Bapa, my daughter’s wedding is approaching, and my financial situation is very weak. Please bless me.”

“Go! You will find a wealthy employer who will solve all your financial problems!” Swamishri clapped his back with both hands.

Just a few days later, a gasket factory was started near the town of Bhayali. Fulabhai’s son, Shantilal, happened to meet a British engineer involved in the project. From this chance encounter, he received a job offer with an excellent salary that resolved the family’s financial insecurity. This incident strengthened Fulabhai’s conviction. Ultimately, he would

offer two of his sons to Swamishri to become sadhus.

From here, Swamishri traveled to Bhadran, Palaj, and Davol before arriving in Gana. In the past, when Shriji Maharaj and Shastriji Maharaj had visited Gana, the villagers had received them with ghee torches. Continuing that tradition, the entire village lit torches of ghee to welcome Swamishri. Swamishri granted devotees the divine bliss of his discourses and sanctified many people's homes. Harmanbhai sponsored a meal for the entire village, and the *yuvak mandal* served very sincerely to make the event a success.

Then, Swamishri traveled to Anand, and on Magshar *vad* 11, Swamishri went to Vartal with Pramukh Swami, Mota Swami, Shrijiswarupdas Swami, other sadhus, and about 150 devotees, including many prominent devotees from Ahmedabad.

Swamishri had darshan in the Vartal mandir. The *brahmacharis* welcomed Swamishri with sanctified garlands of flowers.

Swamishri did *dhun* before Harikrishna Maharaj. Then he went for darshan at all the sanctified spots and met with the senior sadhus of the mandir. After doing darshan at the sanctified East-facing seat and Joban Pagi's loft, Swamishri sanctified the home of the village's *mukhi* (chief). The water in Gomti Pond was covered with a thick film of algae. Yet, Swamishri explained the glory of the sacred spot to everyone and had everyone take a dip in it while doing so himself as well. The devotees offered their puja. Swamishri did *dhun* while praying for four holy resolutions:

1) May the whole world worship Swaminarayan, 2) may everyone's worldly situation improve, 3) may the construction work of the Gadhada mandir finish soon, 4) may peace prevail and Satsang grow in Africa. At the time, the Mau Mau uprising in British-controlled Kenya had caused considerable violence and bloodshed. Swamishri prayed that the violence may stop so that the devotees residing in Kenya would be safe.

Then, Swamishri returned to Anand.

One devotee in Anand had become discouraged about Satsang. He felt that Satsang was no longer the way it had been in Shastriji Maharaj's time. When Swamishri came to know of this he said, "We are not doing anything wrong. We are propagating the truth. God is completely manifest through this Sant. But, if someone does not accept this truth, that is their prerogative!"

One devotee said, "Bapa, Tribhuvan Gopal had also fallen out of Satsang, hadn't he?"

Swamishri immediately replied, "Guru! We cannot say that. We should not say that he had fallen out, but that he had to repeat a grade! He passed on his second effort. Shastriji Maharaj was Shastriji Maharaj! A neem tree remains a neem tree! He had such conviction. We should not waver in our conviction. We have served Swamishri like that!"

Swamishri was incapable of criticizing anyone or getting involved in a discussion



critical of someone. Because of that, his speed and intensity in seeing virtues in others far surpassed the ability of ordinary people.

From here, Mota Swami and Pramukh Swami traveled toward Khandesh. Swamishri traveled via Uttarsanda to Nadiad.

The devotees in Nadiad offered Swamishri a grand welcome at the train station and took him in a festive procession to the Swaminarayan mandir. At the mandir gate, the mandir's administrators, Kanjibhai Brahmbhatt and Ishwarbhai Labhshankar Pandya, offered Swamishri flower garlands. After doing darshan in the mandir, Swamishri sat in the assembly hall. Harmanbhai made an impassioned call to action to the assembled devotees to maintain unity and mutual affection in order to spread the Sampradaya throughout the world.

In the evening, a public assembly was held in the Modh Brahmin Community Center in Ravpura. New Ravpura, the adjoining streets, and the location of the assembly had all been

beautifully festooned with decorative strings of leaves and flowers. Swamishri announced the establishment of the Shastriji Maharaj Yuvak Mandal, which the youths accepted with great enthusiasm. Then, after sanctifying many people's homes, Swamishri had his meal at the home of Krishnalal Jivabhai Patel. The local devotees including Pravinchandra Gordhandas Brahmbhatt, Ghanshyambhai Dattribhai, Vitthalbhai Bakorbhai, Bhailalbhai, Maganbhai Vimavala, and Thakorbhai Secretary had made very good arrangements on this occasion.

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