

Chapter 21

Shastriji Maharaj Special Train

Swamishri, accompanied by Pramukh Swami, Mota Swami, and a total of sixteen sadhus and 500 devotees were going on a pilgrimage. Swamishri would often say, “Shastriji Maharaj had told me, ‘Take Naranda on a pilgrimage to Chhapaiya.’ So, we have organized this special train to take Pramukh Swami to Chhapaiya and Ayodhya for darshan.” While they would be traveling to countless pilgrimage places in North India, to Swamishri’s mind, darshan of Chhapaiya was the center point and purpose of this pilgrimage. In his letters to devotees, Swamishri had emphasized only the darshan of Chhapaiya.

The devotees going on the pilgrimage gathered in Atladara. Everyone was extremely excited to be going on a pilgrimage with Swamishri. On Monday afternoon, the entire group reached Vadodara station, where

Swamishri was welcomed with a festive band. The entire train was decorated with flower garlands. The second class compartment in which Swamishri was going to be sitting had also been decorated by the youths. The station was jampacked with devotees. A very large number of devotees had come to the station to see Swamishri off, and they jostled to have Swamishri's darshan and blessings. Harmanbhai delivered a short speech to mark the occasion. Amidst the music of Vadodara's famous Star Marching Band and the roars of the devotees' *jay naad*, the train departed from the station on 23 November 1953 at 3:45 p.m. Countless devotees who had come to see Swamishri off felt a sense of regret that, "We missed out. Such an opportunity will never come again."

The organizers had been forced to add two compartments to the special train to accomodate the large number of devotees who had signed up for the pilgrimage at the last moment. Yet, the devotees who had not joined

the pilgrimage but had just come to the station to see Swamishri off now dispersed heavy-hearted.

The special train was named “Shastriji Maharaj Swaminarayan Special Train.” Moreover, a historic event for the Sampradaya had been organized as part of the pilgrimage. The Ahmedabad diocese’s Acharya Devendraprasadji Maharaj and the entire Satsang community of sadhus and devotees had long nourished an intense desire that a large railway station be constructed at “Chhapaiya Swaminarayan.” Even after spending a considerable amount of money and effort on this project over the last fifty years, the Ahmedabad diocese had nothing to show for it. As it turned out, Swamishri brought about the fulfillment of Acharya Maharaj’s long-standing wish. Swamishri had made a wish that a railway station should be constructed in Chhapaiya. He spoke of his wish to Nandaji. Nandaji had striven to make this possible to please Swamishri. He spoke to the railway

minister of India, the respected Lalbahadur Shastri. The plans immediately moved forward, and an order was given to the railway manager and other railway officials to begin construction of a large railway station at “Chhapaiya Swaminarayan.” Nandaji promised to travel to Chhapaiya for darshan on this special occasion.

Yet, amidst these upcoming historic occasions, Swamishri had engaged in a perplexing *lila*. Just a few days before the pilgrimage was to begin, Swamishri fell sick in Gondal. The organizers of the pilgrimage were disturbed by this turn of events. Everyone rushed to Gondal. Swamishri was suffering from a high fever and significant weakness. But, Swamishri reassured Harmanbhai and the other devotees, “I am doing much better now. The special train pilgrimage won’t be canceled.”

On this occasion, Bhaktiba was in Gondal. She admonished the organizers, “It is not at all appropriate that you are taking Swamishri on a pilgrimage to Haridwar and Chhapaiya in such

cold weather despite his delicate health.” Everyone was dismayed.

Despite his weakness, Swamishri enthusiastically informed the devotees, “Because I had your darshan, my health is now fine. Don’t worry at all. Make all the necessary arrangements. Shastriji Maharaj, Gunatitanand Swami, and Shriji Maharaj himself are with us. The cold will disappear. Maharaj will not let anyone suffer from any type of pain or hardship. Be calm. Understanding each other’s greatness, immerse yourself in service.”

Swamishri instructed everyone to turn *malas* and perform *pradakshinas* in Akshar Deri for the success of the pilgrimage. Soon, Swamishri himself arrived in Akshar Deri. Everyone was surprised and exclaimed, “Bapa! Why have you come out? What about your fever and weakness!”

Swamishri laughed and informed everyone, “The illness is now gone! I don’t have a fever anymore!” That was when everyone realized

that this great soul's behavior was incomprehensible.

Everyone was relieved and continued the hectic preparations for the pilgrimage as before.

But, before the organizers left to work on their separate tasks, Swamishri told them, “Here, let me provide you some sustenance in the form of spiritual talks. Swami used to say that the *maya* of liberated souls is extremely weighty. When Swami was in Junagadh, many devotees would sit around him and listen to his talks, bringing peace to their hearts. He planted the seeds that Shastriji Maharaj later cultivated into trees. Now, we are playing in the shade of those trees. And that is what we are meant to do. Now, we must ensure that its canopy expands. So, renounce ego, any desire for worldly greatness, and rigidity. There is no point in any of that. Remain humble. Be polite. Maintain a positive outlook towards everyone. Serve with affection, thereby pleasing God and

the great Sant. That is the true fulfillment of one's human birth.”

It seemed that Swamishri had performed this *lila* so that no one forgot about God's doership and control and so that everyone could work together smoothly and with great respect and affection for each other. For Swamishri, the purpose of the pilgrimage was to fulfill Shastriji Maharaj's wish to take Pramukh Swami to Chhapaiya for darshan, and also to reinforce for everyone the essential principles of mutual affection amidst hardship through the mobile *brahmavidya* laboratory that was the pilgrimage's special train. As the leader of the Gunatit community, Swamishri cast aside his illness and joined the pilgrimage with the same joyous good health as before.