

# Chapter 25

## **In the Villages Surrounding Tororo**

On 6 June 1955, Swamishri departed from Jinja and traveled to Busembatia. The devotees had decorated the entire village and arranged for a marching band to welcome Swamishri. Popatlalbhair had made excellent arrangements for the entire festival. In the evening, everyone traveled to Tororo.

In Tororo, from Vallabhbhai's workshop next to the railway staff quarters, everyone led Swamishri in a festive procession to the mandir on the outskirts of the village. Everyone offered flower garlands to welcome Swamishri and the sadhus. As a result of Bhaktaraj Maganbhai's constant association, Tororo had become a hub of East Africa Satsang, and the devotees there naturally possessed a distinctive enthusiasm. Due to a series of favorable factors, including a small village, a laid-back lifestyle, financial stability, and immersion in Satsang, the

devotees of Tororo were eager to please Swamishri with mind, body, and wealth.

From here, Swamishri traveled to Bukedea to sanctify the homes of Ishwarbhai, Shivabhai, and Ambalalbhai. Swamishri also visited Gordhanbhai's home in Kidongole.

On 7 June 1955, on the way back to Tororo, Swamishri halted briefly at Mbale and visited the shops of Jashbhai and Maganbhai. On this occasion, many of the prominent villagers had also come for Swamishri's darshan.

On 8 June 1955, Swamishri addressed the spiritual assembly in Tororo:

“Even if this Sadhu beats you on the head with boots, he will take you to Akshardham. What are these boots? They are the stings of harsh words which will take you to Akshardham. Those who only praise us but do not reprimand us will cast us into *narak*. If we remember God, he will take care of us. After having attained God, that is what we must do. Whom have we attained? Where do we want to

go? If we forsake obstinacy, ego, and jealousy, then we will experience peace within, free from agitation. We must never let go of the form of God we have attained. Follow his commands. Observe the five *vartmans*. ‘Who will know what we do here?’ Don’t think like that. He is such that, ‘*Tan ki jāne, man ki jāne, jāne chittaki chori*’ (He knows our deeds, our thoughts, and even our inner deceptions). God knows everything.

“Who is the best? He who is ready to give his life to maintain his Satsang, and will not lapse in following God’s commands or the practice of *upasana*. Otherwise, even if you give hundreds of thousands of rupees, it is fruitless. When so many others do not engage in prohibited activities, why should we? Do not waste money. Give up your addictions. In Jinja, Manibhai gave up his three-decade addiction to cigarettes. One should remove one’s shoes when one sits to eat. Do not eat food cooked in local restaurants. Cook the food yourself or make other arrangements. Forswear the

thought, ‘It is okay to let it slide.’ We are followers of Swaminarayan. Vaniyas, the one-eyed, and Swaminarayans cannot be tricked.

“Vaniyas maintain proper accounts of their finances. If there is a mistake of a single cent in their accounts, they would burn eightpence worth of lamp oil to correct it. A one-eyed person is also said to be very fastidious. Similarly, a follower of Swaminarayan would not be tricked. We do not want to fool anyone, but we must do proper due diligence before making a decision. Since we are devotees of God, we should not engage in chicanery. We should not betray anyone’s trust. God is pleased with those who fully follow his commands. You should not bilk anyone of their rightful property or take what is not yours. Think before you act. We have come to make a living, but as Hindus, we should come together and read the Vachanamrut and Swamini Vato. We cannot frequently come to this continent. So, if you maintain God’s refuge, he will protect you from

difficulties and grant you food and basic necessities.

“There was once a Muslim Saheb who had a habit of stealing. If he saw someone’s threshed grains lying in the threshing common ground, he would surreptitiously steal them. He would admire his takings, thinking, ‘How large my fifty maund pile of grain has become!’ Allah knew of his deception and sent ten camel-riding thieves. While the Muslim Saheb was sleeping, the thieves took all his grains and left by 4 a.m. By the time the Saheb awoke, they had taken everything. He thought to himself, while I have lost the 150 maunds of grains I had stolen, I also lost the 50 maunds of grains that were actually mine.

“God will protect what is ours. But, God will punish the thief. He won’t let him take what is ours. Even if he has broken into our house, he would be deterred. If you take refuge of God and behave ethically, God will be pleased. You should listen to spiritual discourses. One requires God’s refuge and conviction in

following his commands. God will not let you go hungry. Remaining faithful to one spouse makes one forever a *brahmachari*. You will be unable to have this attainment again. In his time, Shriji Maharaj protected all the sadhus and many others. He straightened out bad men just by his glance. He sent them to Akshardham. That which takes us to God's abode is true devotion. This is just the first stage."

Then, in the evening assembly, Swamishri said, "Everyone should observe dharma. The great *munis* and *rishis* also observed it. Dharma is our duty. One who observes the five *vartmans* is a *satsangi*. Everyone should get together. Everyone should sing a variety of kirtans. If we maintain unity, then nothing will be able to thwart us. We are telling this to every one of you who has come to this foreign country. Observe dharma and give up alcohol. If there are any disputes, one should resolve them through the mediation of five respected men, but one should not resort to the courts.

The village may have twenty-five shops, but each person will earn according to his fate. ‘*Tu mari jakarmā to hu tāri fakarmā*’ (If you have taken my refuge, your concerns are mine.) We should behave in this way. Filter your water before drinking it. Do not eat with your shoes on. Do not drink alcohol. Everyone should observe their own dharma. One should respect all faiths, but believe in your own choicest deity. If we deviate from the path of dharma, we will surely fall. Muktanand Swami says that our entire life is frittered away in delusion. But we should try to do as much as we can.

“To accept God’s refuge is a great thing. Once, Shivji and Parvati were walking along. Parvati said, ‘Everyone is suffering so much. Please give them something.’ Shivji said, ‘I will certainly give, but no one will accept it.’ So saying, he cast a gold bracelet onto the road. Four people were walking down the road. Although the gold bracelet was on the ground, they did not see it. Shivji said, ‘See, they just walked past it. They only get what they

deserve.’ If we have kept God then he could give us 5,000 shillings in an instant, and if we just sit there, then we would get nothing.”

In the spiritual assembly at night, Swamishri spoke on developing a strong connection with the Satpurush. He said:

“If one performs all one’s actions while doing bhajan, one will experience inner peace. No one should transgress God’s commands. Certainly, you should work. But do so while contemplating on God in one’s mind and speaking his name with one’s mouth. In this way, one should remain focused on God while doing one’s work. If one properly remembers God, then God will ensure one’s work is accomplished. One should take God’s name with singular concentration. If one maintains affection for the Satpurush, then bhajan would happen naturally.

“Arjan Bhagat was very adept in worldly affairs. Maharaj came to fetch a devotee who was his neighbor. Arjan Bhagat thus had Maharaj’s darshan. As Maharaj was taking the



devotee to Akshardham, Arjan Bhagat thought, ‘Let me grab onto the underside of the celestial vehicle and hitch a ride to Akshardham.’ But soon, Maharaj said, ‘Muktanand Swami! Do you smell something rotten?’ When he looked down, Maharaj said, ‘It is he who stinks.’ Thus, Maharaj pried his hands from the celestial vehicle and left him on the earth. Arjanbhai thought to himself, ‘Why did this happen? Why was I forced to stay?’ Then, in Junagadh, he asked Swami, ‘Swami, today I had this experience.’ Swami explained, ‘While you are not deficient in following God’s commands and his *upasana*, you take an inordinate interest in worldly affairs and refuse to give up your inclination to stay at the helm of things. If you want to go to Akshardham, come to the mandir and turn the *mala* properly while chanting God’s name. Believe yourself to be *brahmarup*.’ Arjanbhai trusted Swamishri’s words. He did as Swamishri had directed, and in thirty-one days, Maharaj came to fetch him to Akshardham.

Maharaj removed the stench of worldly affairs that had enveloped him.

“When one has such a strong attachment, how can Maharaj take one to Akshardham? Over there, the admissions criteria are very strict. No laxity is tolerated. So, one should not remain upset. See the positive. Keep God. God will manage our worldly affairs. When we become immersed in water, we don’t feel its weight on our head, but if we separate ourselves from the water and carry it on our head, we will feel its burden. So, we should not do that.”

In Nagongera today, there was an excellent spiritual festival in Swamishri’s presence. About 3,000 devotees who had come from the surrounding villages were served prasad. Swamishri even initiated some of the natives into the Satsang fellowship. Swamishri particularly wished that “The natives should come into contact with Satsang. The Shikshapatri should be translated into their Swahili language and given to them.”

In celebration of Swamishri's arrival and so that countless spiritual aspirants could avail of his darshan and *samagam*, the local devotees organized a grand feast in which Thakorji's *mahaprasad* would be served to everyone in Tororo on 12 June 1955. Many devotees from the surrounding villages had come there for this occasion.

On 14 June 1955, the spiritual assembly held at Bhaktaraj Maganbhai's cremation site lasted until 3:30 a.m. Swamishri, the sadhus, and many senior devotees delivered extraordinary discourses. It was a festival to be remembered.

Chaturbhai of Mbale took Swamishri to sanctify the village of Vaduda. Chaturbhai had himself founded this village.

Moreover, Muljibhai of Mbale took Swamishri to sanctify the village of Kakoro and visit the homes of the devotees and spiritual aspirants there. In the evening, Swamishri traveled to Sironko. Swamishri also went to the home of Purushottamdas Mukhi in Busia, and

then traveled to Siroti and other villages and fulfilled everyone's wishes.

On Jeth *sud* 13, V.S. 2011 the anniversary of Nirgundas Swami's passing, a festival was organized in the small village of Mazanzi on the banks of Lake Victoria. Together with about 500 devotees, Swamishri bathed in the lake. Rambhai and Becharbhai made excellent arrangements for the event. Offering his blessings here, Swamishri said, "Whoever drinks this water will become *satsangi*."

Due to an eclipse on 20 June 1955, Swamishri and the devotees engaged in spiritual discourses from 4 a.m. to 7 a.m.