

[Buying a Week Alone at a Temple of Silence](#)

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It is Sunday morning. Five miles outside the noisy town of Surat, you reach the quiet greenery of the Hari Om Ashram, on the serene banks of the Tapti river in Gujarat, India.

After attending the weekly prayers, you are taken to a large room you booked a year ago, where you'll stay alone in silence for a week. The visitors chant "Hari Om" loudly in your room and go away. The assistant locks you alone in that room until the next Sunday morning, unless you want to stay longer.

All doors and windows are closed, but there is a niche two by two feet in the front wall. At 10:00 A.M. and 5:00 P.M., a boy gives you a simple vegetarian lunch and dinner through that window, and shouts "Hari Om". At 5:00 A.M. and 2:00 P.M. you get tea or coffee. You also get hot water for the bath at 5:15 A.M., flowers and incense (for puja) at 7:00 A.M. and your clothes washed daily. All of this costs you just US\$0.27 per day.

These Temples of Silence, run by the Hari Om Ashram, have a waiting list a year or more long. There is no access to radio, T.V. or newspaper, although you can listen to Gujarati devotional music on the common mike, but only for an hour a day. All you can hear from outside is the chirping of birds and squirrels. It is certainly golden silence, but not so easy for the new-comer to pass a week.

You have full choice of doing your own meditation, exercise, worship, singing, spiritual study or yoga in your large and darkened room - a small electric light is

available for spiritual reading. At the end of the week, you write about your experiences and read those written by others. Hundreds have participated in the last 33 years, from eighty-eight-year-olds with acute heart disease, to mothers with babies in their arms. Foreigners and people of all religions are admitted. One American devotee stayed 388 days - an ashram record!

Shree Mota Maharaj founded these two ashrams out of compassion for seekers who could not get quiet, inexpensive places with good food. He had himself suffered for want of such facilities during his many years of sadhana.

Mota was born in 1898 in a very poor lower-class family. His mother worked as a house maid and raised the children. His father used to sing on the streets and earned enough only for his addiction to tobacco and opium. Chuniya (which was Mota's earlier name) had to bear the brunt of raising a family. Chuniya adored the teachings of Mahatma Gandhi and always found time to meet God-men and bards, even if it meant less food and sleep. Chuniya was torn between love of God and his responsibility to his mother. Due to the endless hardships of poverty, anxiety and exhaustion Chuniya started getting fits of hysteria.

It became so unbearable by age of 24 he decided to end his life and jumped into the Narmada river from a height of thirty feet. Miraculously, at that moment a large forceful wave of the river threw his body on a safe coastal spot. He was astounded and felt it must be the wish of God, that he had useful work to do in his life.

When Mahatma Gandhi gave the call to the nation for a non-violent campaign for freedom, Chuniya left college, jumped into the Satyagraha, was jailed, and later continued work for the untouchables.

But the call of the Divine soon became his burning passion. He gained valuable help from five gurus, who tested severely his readiness and sincerity. Sai Baba and Balayogiji were his main gurus. He slept little and continued all kinds of sadhana in lonely places for days at a time with little food or amenities.

At the age of 41, Chuniya attained the pinnacle of Self-Realization. Seekers and

admirers slowly started coming to him. People started calling him Mota Maharaj ("Mota" meaning elderly or respected person). Money began to be poured on him. He often built class-rooms for schools for the poor. He died at the age of 78 but continued to inspire hundreds through his Temples of Silence and lifelong dedication to social work.

His spiritual advice for seekers lives today:

1. Observe as much vocal and mental silence as possible.
2. Don't brood over chains of thoughts, but be aware, as a detached witness.
3. Concentrate on the heart with japa and mantra, remembering its essence.
4. Take service of others as service of God. Look upon all work that falls to your lot as God's gifts.
5. See the bright side of everything and everybody. Don't judge others, don't argue and don't insist on having your own way.
6. Pray to God with intense devotion, and narrate to him all your joys and sorrows. Cultivate cheerfulness and deep love.

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