

Chapter 9

Ji Re Sant Sadā Shital Rahe... (The Sant Remains Forever Serene...)

Once, Vignandas Swami went with his *mandal* of sadhus to the village of Keriya, near Ningala. Most of the village was affiliated with the Vartal Gadi, and there were only a few devotees with faith in Akshar Purushottam *upasana*. The sadhus made their accommodations in the village's Swaminarayan mandir. After the evening discourses, the devotees returned to their own homes. Yogi Maharaj sang *cheshta* and was preparing to go to bed when suddenly, a group of sadhus of the Vartal Gadi arrived from Gadhada to expel the sadhus of Akshar Purushottam from the village. The hate-filled sadhus from Gadhada stormed the mandir and tossed the belongings of Vignandas Swami's *mandal* into the courtyard. Then, they locked the mandir gate from the inside and mercilessly beat Yogi Maharaj,

Vignandas Swami, and the other sadhus of their group. Yogi Maharaj and the sadhus chanted, “Swaminarayan, Swaminarayan,” and remembered Maharaj while enduring the savage beating without so much as raising an arm to ward off the blows.

The attackers’ angry shouts and the sickening sounds of their punches and kicks landing upon defenseless bodies carried through the silent night, alerting the entire village that the sadhus from Gadhada were assaulting the sadhus of Shastriji Maharaj. Odhavjibhai Acharya, a lawyer in the village who had faith in Akshar Purushottam *upasana*, rushed to the mandir as soon as he heard about the ongoing attack. Finding the mandir gate locked from the inside, he jumped over the compound wall and into the mandir.

He was stunned by the scene that greeted him. The sadhus of the Vartal Gadi were savagely beating Yogi Maharaj, Vignandas Swami, and his sadhus while the latter were enduring those blows with no response other

than soft exhalations of “Swaminarayan, Swaminarayan.” Outraged by the cruelty meted out upon these meek, pure-hearted, and virtuous sadhus, Odhavjibhai bellowed, “I am warning you! If you strike these innocent sadhus one more time...”

The sadhus of the Vartal Gadi were startled to hear this booming challenge. They glanced into the courtyard to see the lawyer, Odhavjibhai, scowling at them. Being caught red-handed by a person of such distinction left the sadhus of the Vartal Gadi flustered. Odhavjibhai had the door unlocked, escorted Yogi Maharaj and the sadhus outside, and rebuked the sadhus of the Vartal Gadi.

Just as Yogi Maharaj and Vignandas Swami exited the mandir, one of the sadhus of the Vartal Gadi was overcome by his demonic impulses. He rushed at Yogi Maharaj, lifted him up from the waist, and slammed him against a brick wall. The sudden jolt left Yogi Maharaj whiplashed and in severe pain, but he stoically continued chanting the Swaminarayan

mantra, remembering Maharaj and Swami. The villagers who had witnessed this inhumane cruelty were incensed, and they forced the sadhus of Gadhada to leave their village.

Soon, Kuberbhai of Bhavnagar came to know of the attack on the sadhus, and he immediately rushed to Keriya. He encountered the sadhus at Ningala station. Seeing their bodies bruised and battered from the brutal persecution they had suffered brought tears to his eyes. He pleaded with the sadhus, “Swami, let’s go to the police station to register a complaint and file a case in court.”

Yogi Maharaj immediately pressed his hands over his ears and said, “What are you saying! Swaminarayan Bhagwan is our God! We cannot take legal action against his sadhus!”

Yet Kuberbhai and the other devotees continued to insist.

Yogi Maharaj replied, “Don’t speak of such things. We are sadhus, and honor and insult

are the same to us. Even if someone beats us, we should only wish them well.”

Everyone looked upon Yogi Maharaj’s remarkable lack of malice with astonishment. Ultimately, everyone went to Bhavnagar, where they treated the wounds suffered by Yogi Maharaj and the sadhus.

When the senior sadhus of Gadhada came to know that their sadhus had beaten Shastriji Maharaj’s sadhus, they came to Bhavnagar to meet Kuberbhai and ask forgiveness for the actions of their erring sadhus.

From Bhavnagar, Vignandas Swami and his *mandal* continued their travels through the surrounding villages.