

Chapter 10

Faith in the Swaminarayan Mantra Counteracts Cobra Venom

In 1932–33 (V.S. 1989), while Akshar Mandir in Gondal was under construction, the sadhus resided in three rooms near a tamarind tree by the assembly hall. One night, after singing *cheshta*, Yogi Maharaj went to sleep in his spot in the middle room. Shastriji Maharaj was sleeping next to him.

In the middle of the night, a deadly black cobra bit the index finger on Yogi Maharaj’s left hand. Yogi Maharaj immediately woke up. He lit a lantern and discovered the black cobra coiled underneath a chest in the corner of the room.

Hearing these slight movements, Shastriji Maharaj awoke to discover that Jogi had been bitten by a cobra. He immediately had Yogi Maharaj taken to Akshar Deri and had everyone begin chanting the Swaminarayan

dhun. But, as the cobra venom spread throughout Yogi Maharaj's bloodstream, his body began to darken. Many people suggested that a doctor should be summoned to provide medicine for Yogi Maharaj, but Shastriji Maharaj refused. Compared to the immeasurable power of the Swaminarayan mantra, what could a doctor do? All the sadhus gathered together and began intensely singing the Swaminarayan *dhun*.

Aksharbrahma Gunatitanand Swami's words that "The Swaminarayan mantra can counteract the venom of a black cobra" were going to be corroborated today. After just a few hours of the Swaminarayan *dhun*, the effects of the cobra venom faded. However, the venom had dissolved the bone of Yogi Maharaj's left index finger where the snake had bitten him. All the sadhus and devotees as well as Maharaja Bhagwatsinhji and numerous royal officers witnessed this miracle and realized the glory of Akshar Deri and the Swaminarayan mantra.

The education minister of the state of Gondal, Chandubhai Patel had once spoken of this incident as follows:

I am not affiliated with any religious denomination. I am a committed reformist. Yet, I have immense respect for Shastriji Maharaj. I have also come into close contact with this “Paramatmaswaroop” Swami’s two great disciples—Swami Gnanjivandasji and Swami Nirgundasji. Gnanjivandas is an embodiment of spiritual realization. Once, in Gondal he had been bitten on his finger by a deadly black cobra. Even in that situation, he expressed a disinclination to seek out medical treatment. Instead, he kept his focus on the truth revealed in the Swamini Vato that, ‘The Swaminarayan mantra is so powerful that it can counteract even the venom of a black cobra.’ Accordingly, the sadhus began chanting the Swaminarayan *dhun* in the Akshar Deri. Our ruler, Bhagwatsinhji Maharaja had told me, ‘Please convince him to visit a doctor immediately and take any medicine or

treatment that he prescribes.’ Thus, we told Gnanjivandasji, ‘Swamiji! In this situation, your spiritual wisdom won’t help you. It will remain here, and you will pass away. So please listen to my advice.’ However, in the flow of such intense *dhun* and bhajan, who would listen to my suggestion? But, to everyone’s astonishment, the effect of the terrible cobra venom faded away! For those who witnessed this miracle with their own eyes, what feelings could they bear for such a sadhu except profound veneration?

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Due to the tireless service of Yogi Maharaj and the sadhus, the construction of Akshar Mandir was progressing at a rapid pace. Yogi Maharaj remained engaged in *seva* day and night. In digging the foundations, personally cooking *rotla* for the sadhus, artisans, stone workers, and laborers, and in every other service, Yogi Maharaj paid no heed to his bodily needs.

Amidst this hectic construction work, Shastriji Maharaj called all the sadhus to Sarangpur to celebrate the Jal-Jhilani festival just as he did every year. The festival was celebrated enthusiastically, and on the night of *ekadashi*, Shastriji Maharaj delivered discourses in the assembly hall. Everyone was planning to remain in Sarangpur until the full moon day.

However, Yogi Maharaj and his sadhus' absence from Gondal provided their opponents an opportunity to spread false rumors. They approached Maharaja Bhagwatsinhji and said, "See, Shastri's disciples have deserted the mandir, leaving it unfinished."

Maharaja Bhagwatsinhji had given Shastriji Maharaj the land under the condition that the mandir would be completed in three years. So, Bhagwatsinhji instructed the state's chief engineer, Virendra Mehta, to investigate these claims. Virendra Mehta resolved to visit Akshar Mandir the next day to inspect the progress of construction.

But while his opponents had initiated these secret machinations, what could stay hidden from the omniscient Shastriji Maharaj? On Bhadarva *sud* 12, he called Yogi Maharaj and the sadhus and instructed them to return to Gondal and restart construction immediately. The sadhus said, “We can leave on the 2:30 p.m. train, but how will we reach Botad before then?”

Shastriji Maharaj said, “There is a truck on its way here. Have lunch right now and keep your bags packed.”

The sadhus had barely packed their belongings when a passing truck slowed at the mandir, and the driver yelled, “Anyone need a lift to Botad?”

Shastriji Maharaj told Hakabhai to go with the sadhus to Botad station to purchase their train tickets to Jasdan station. Everyone left the mandir in such a rush that some sadhus forgot their *dhotiyas* while others forgot their bowls or gourds. Recalling this incident, Yogi Maharaj

has written, “I can still vividly see that scene in my mind’s eye.”

Around thirty sadhus and devotees piled into the truck bed and reached Botad station just in time. They quickly boarded the train and arrived in Jasdan at 4:30 p.m. Here, they went to Popatbhai Sheth’s house, where they delivered discourses, sang *cheshta*, and spent the night.

At 7 a.m. the next morning, they again piled into the back of a passing truck and left Jasdan. At 10:30 a.m., they reached Gondal and immediately restarted the mandir construction work. After lunch and a very brief midday rest, all the sadhus and devotees rejoined the construction work at exactly 2 p.m. At 3 p.m., Maharaja Bhagwatsinhji and Chief Engineer Virendra Mehta arrived for their unannounced inspection. They were surprised to see 50 to 60 sadhus, devotees, masons, and laborers fully engaged in the mandir construction. They realized that they had been fed false information.

Yogi Maharaj politely explained to Maharaja Bhagwatsinhji, “At the command of our guru Shastriji Maharaj, we had all gone to Sarangpur to celebrate the Jal-Jhilani Festival. We returned here as soon as the festival finished.”

This forthright, candid answer resolved all the questions they had. Thus, Maharaja Bhagwatsinhji expressed his satisfaction saying, “Swami, please let us know if you encounter any troubles. We will give you our full support.”

Yogi Maharaj said, “While we don’t have any other problems, we are experiencing a shortage of lime. We cannot get enough of it in a timely fashion.”

Bhagwatsinhji immediately telephoned his officers and instructed them to arrange for sufficient lime to be delivered to Akshar Mandir without delay. Then, he returned to his palace, severely rebuked the mischief-mongers who had fed him false information, and fined them fifty rupees.