

Chapter 9

Hospitality and Appeal to Rural Devotees

Nanjibhai of Devchadi and Devji Bhagat of Mevasa were among the devotees present for the centenary celebrations of the Vartal mandir. After the festival ended, they visited several villages in central Gujarat sanctified by Bhagwan Swaminarayan. Then, after staying for some time in Ahmedabad, they traveled to Rajkot. In Rajkot, Devji Bhagat expressed a wish to do darshan at the Swaminarayan mandir on Kadiya Street. When the devotees reached the mandir, the *thal* had just been offered to Thakorji, and it was lunchtime. Yogi Maharaj and Chhaganlal Dhaneshwar Raval were present there, while Vignandas Swami was in Bhavnagar.

Yogi Maharaj was delighted to see these devotees and insisted they have lunch before departing. He prepared their plates and urged,

“You cannot go without accepting some of Thakorji’s sanctified food.” Although Yogi Maharaj had never met these two devotees, he fed them with great affection. After that, he served Bhagwatswarupdas Swami lunch, and only then did he eat.

Both devotees could not help but note the devotion with which Yogi Maharaj had sung *thal*, the care with which he had fed the elderly blind sadhu, the respect with which he had held his hand and led him to bed, and the pure love with which he had fed two unknown devotees. Seeing Yogi Maharaj’s pure behavior, affectionate nature, and conscientiousness, both new devotees instantly developed a deep reverence for him.

After lunch, Yogi Maharaj sat with the two devotees and inquired about their backgrounds. Then, he delivered the afternoon discourses from the Vachanamrut and gave the devotees leave to go. The devotees traveled to Gondal and then arrived in Devchadi.

After meeting these two devotees in Rajkot, Yogi Maharaj began to visit Devchadi in his travels. At the time, Akshar Mandir was under construction in Gondal. In Devchadi, Yogi Maharaj would stay at the house of Devjibhai Kadiya, who would arrange for a bullock cart. Yogi Maharaj would travel in the bullock cart to the surrounding areas to beg for alms, stating, “We want to liberate everyone.”

In Devchadi, Nanjibhai, his brother Bhurabhai, Gokulbhai, Bhimjibhai, Narsibhai, Jerambhai, Shamjibhai, Devjibhai, and others, together with their extended families, became staunch believers of Akshar Purushottam *upasana* and followers of Shastriji Maharaj.

From Devchadi, Yogi Maharaj would arrange for a bullock cart to take him to Khokhari-Shivrajgadh. Then, he would travel along with Nanjibhai to Sultanpur, Derdi, Pipaliya, Kunkavav, and various surrounding villages.

When traveling with Vignandas Swami, Yogi Maharaj would always have to stay on his toes.

Once, after serving Vignandas Swami his food, Yogi Maharaj took some food in his bowl and sat down to eat. Suddenly, Vignandas Swami came there and randomly said, “Gnanji! Get up! Recite the first ten Swami Vatos of the fourth chapter.”

Yogi Maharaj immediately stood up and recited all ten *vato* without a mistake. Then, Vignandas Swami filled Yogi Maharaj’s bowl to the brim with water and said, “Now, mix your food and eat it!”

Yogi Maharaj calmly drank the watery concoction in his bowl as if nothing had happened!

On countless occasions, Vignandas Swami would arrive just as Yogi Maharaj sat down to eat and make him stand and recite Swamini Vato from memory. Sometimes, if Yogi Maharaj made some mistake in reciting the Vato, Vignandas Swami would command him to fast. Sometimes, as punishment, he would instruct Yogi Maharaj to hold out his hands, palms down, and then strike his fingers with a rolling

pin! The vicious strikes of the rolling pin on his delicate fingers would cause Yogi Maharaj to tremble with pain, but he would never utter a single word. He endured everything in silence.

The devotees seethed to see the abuse that Vignandas Swami meted out on Yogi Maharaj. They noted that Vignandas Swami never treated Purushottam Bhagat this way because Purushottam Bhagat had no qualms repaying Vignandas Swami's abuse in kind. However, Yogi Maharaj had adopted the stance of utter docility before Vignandas Swami.

Only due to his innate spiritual enlightenment could Yogi Maharaj stay with such a harsh and inhumane guru, endure his rage with a smiling face, and forever continue to try to make him happy.

*“Kim durmarsham titikshunām
kimkāryamsādhubhihi”* What is intolerable for the tolerant? Similarly, what depravity is off-limits to the villainous?