

Chapter 8

In the Blistering Heat, Contentment in Collecting Alms for Akshar Purushottam

Yogi Maharaj had won everyone's hearts through his efforts in cooking for everyone, offering loving hospitality to all the devotees, and affectionately serving food to everyone, from masonry laborers to mandir guests. As they faced an unending series of obstacles, including constant financial hardship, Yogiji Maharaj and his companion sadhu traveled through the surrounding villages begging for alms to feed the sadhus, devotees, and masonry laborers engaged in the mandir construction.

Once in the searing noon sun, these two sadhus were on their way to Polarpur, having collected alms from Bhimnath, near Barvala. Walking down the road, they made a distinctive pair—a young sadhu carrying packages of flour in a cloth bag slung around his shoulders while

also supporting an elderly, infirm sadhu with one hand. Even in the blistering heat of high summer, from the expression on their faces, one would think that they were experiencing a lovely repose in a cool, dense shade. While beads of sweat lined the wrinkles on the face of the elderly sadhu, his expression was one of serene contentment. The young sadhu's face carried an expression of constant joy. From their saffron robes and lowered gaze, it was clear that these were sadhus of the Swaminarayan Sampradaya.

Karsansangji Bapu of Adval had gotten a job as a teacher in Polarpur. He saw this pair of sadhus with cloth bags slung around their shoulders, walking from house to house, calling out, "*Narayan Hare! Sachchidanand Prabho!*" While Karsansangji Bapu was not interested in this particular faith, he was a student of every faith. He respected all sadhus and was curious about spirituality. Moreover, his elders were followers of the Swaminarayan Sampradaya. So he approached the pair of sadhus with a

sympathetic attitude. He bowed down and touched their feet. The elderly sadhu blessed him and said, “Jay Swaminarayan.” Karsansang Bapu asked the sadhus to introduce themselves. They explained that they were sadhus of Shastriji Maharaj of Bochasan. They were traveling from Polarpur to Rojid carrying 20 kg of flour they had collected as alms. Karsansangji Bapu thought, “Since they are carrying such a heavy load in the sweltering heat, let me rent a bullock cart for them.” He offered to provide them with a bullock cart, but the elderly sadhu, Mahanat Swami said, “Rojid is not far; however, our Gnanji Swami must be tired.”

Yogi Maharaj replied, “Rojid is right here. We’ll be there soon.” He smiled and shifted the heavy package of flour to his head. With a cloth bag slung over one shoulder and Mahanat Swami leaning on another shoulder, Yogi Maharaj smiled affectionately at Karsansang Bapu and took his leave with, “Jay Swaminarayan.”

The sadhus continued walking to Rojid, but the gleam of affection in Yogi Maharaj's eyes and his sweet smile made a deep impression on Karsansang Bapu. He craved the opportunity to meet this sadhu again. From his first darshan of this young sadhu, he felt that he had attained something of rare value.

As if Yogi Maharaj had recognized the pure, heartfelt sentiment of Karsansang Bapu, a few days later, Yogi Maharaj and Mahanat Swami returned to Polarpur. Karsansang Bapu was overjoyed. He invited the sadhus to his house. Mahanat Swami spoke about the essence of becoming Aksharrup and worshiping Purushottam. He explained the greatness of Shastriji Maharaj. Overcome with gratitude at the spiritual inspiration these sadhus had granted him, Karsansang Bapu's heart knelt with devotion before them. Coming into contact with true sadhus will automatically awaken the past spiritual merits of a spiritual aspirant.

These two sadhus spent two nights in Polarpur. With his keen intelligence,

Karsansang Bapu witnessed these two sadhus' determination and enthusiasm in propagating true *upasana*. He saw their hearts overflowing with a self-sacrificing devotion towards their object of worship.

Yogi Maharaj had found a special place in Karsansang Bapu's heart. This young sadhu cared nothing for his bodily comforts. He slept on a strip of sackcloth using only his arm as a pillow. His body was almost emaciated, but it shone with the extraordinary radiance of his practice of eightfold *brahmacharya*. He chanted the Swaminarayan mantra with his every breath remaining constantly engrossed in devotion while fully adhering to the observance of the sadhus' five vows prescribed by Bhagwan Swaminarayan. This young sadhu's matchless spirituality convinced Karsansang Bapu that he was in constant communion with Bhagwan Swaminarayan.

When the sadhus took their leave of Karsansang Bapu, his eyes filled with tears. Due to Yogi Maharaj's devotion-filled life, his

heart knelt at the feet of this sadhu. He shared with Yogi Maharaj a thought he had been pondering for some days: “Swami! It would be better to bring a younger sadhu as your companion. It must be so hard for you to travel while looking after this elderly sadhu!”

But, the same devotional sentiments and love that Yogi Maharaj had for his choicest deity, he also bore for this elderly sadhu. Thus, he instantly replied, “Bapu! It is our great fortune to have such a senior sadhu with us since we benefit from the wisdom of his vast experience. We also get the opportunity to serve this sadhu, who is like a great *paramhansa*. Furthermore, shouldering the weight of the alms allows us to offer more service to the mandir.” As was his nature, Yogi Maharaj’s words concluded in a hearty laugh.

Karsansang Bapu was astounded by Yogi Maharaj’s reply. He found Yogi Maharaj’s heart to be as pure as the Himalayan Ganga. He experienced an extraordinary sweetness in his every word. Karsansang Bapu drank up his

nectarine speech. In that instant, he accepted this young sadhu as his guru, as he thought of a verse from Bhartruhari's *Nitishatakam*:

Mansi vachasi kāye punyapiyushpurnā-
s t r i b h u v a n a m u p a k ā r a - s h r e n i b h i h i
prinayantaha,

Paragunaparamāñunparvatikrutya nityam,
nijahrudi vikasantaha santi santaha kiyantaha.

(He whose mind, speech, and body are filled with the nectar of spiritual merit; who pleases all three worlds through his selfless benevolence; whose heart is glad by perceiving as mountainous the minuscule virtues of others; how many such pure sadhus exist?)