

Chapter 1

Nectar of Experience

Even the most glancing recollection of Yogiji Maharaj brings to mind the countless holy men whose words of heartfelt praise continue to reverberate in the firmament, lapping against our ears and touching our hearts with their talks of his divine personality. Often from their very first contact with Yogiji Maharaj, innumerable holy and noble souls were inspired to shower their praises upon Yogiji Maharaj like so many rose petals whose lasting fragrance still thrills us to this very day. While the Sant's own words offer us the best understanding of his true self, as per the commonly held belief that one *sant* can help us recognize another, we begin by enjoying some glimpses of Yogiji Maharaj through the invaluable utterances of some of Hinduism's most distinguished holy men.

What I experienced in Yogiji Maharaj's presence cannot be expressed in words. He was the living embodiment of the experience of the Upanishads. The highest bliss of the all-pervading Brahman that spontaneously radiated from that elderly frame was like a strong breeze of pristine, fragrant love that touched all those near him and filled their hearts. Even if one were not a worthy vessel of that divine love, a single experience of it made it impossible for anyone to wish to leave his presence. Of such a spiritual guru, one cannot speak, one can only prostrate.

What a compelling glimpse! The most complete darshan of Aksharbrahma, which the Upanishads describe as indescribable, is Yogiji Maharaj! Having attained his presence, no one would wish to leave it. These words of the strong proponent of Vedanta, modern international scholar and founder of the Chinmaya Mission, Chinmayanand Swami, speak volumes despite their brevity.

Staunch exponent of the Gita through Swadhyaya, renowned preacher of the Hindu scriptures, and propagator of Indian culture, Dadaji Pandurang Shastriji could not stop himself from repeatedly coming for Yogiji Maharaj's darshan. When they met, he would embrace Yogiji Maharaj like a son embracing his father. He often said, "From the time I spent with Yogiji Maharaj, I cannot forget his unflinching faith, his devotion-filled heart, his detachment from the world, his absolute egolessness, and his many other virtues."

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A benevolent *sant* who would run to the aid of hundreds of thousands of needy people, Ranchhoddasji Bapu had immense love for Yogiji Maharaj from the beginning. He had come to Akshar Mandir in Gondal countless times for Yogiji Maharaj's darshan. Wherever he used to go, he would say, "There are many yogis in India, but Yogiji is the king of yogis. He is one and unparalleled." He often expressed his opinion that in all of India, Yogiji Maharaj

was the only soul sufficiently spiritually powerful to counter the present-day challenge of declining religiosity.

When he met Siddhyogi Muktanand Baba of Ganeshpuri in Pune, Ranchhoddasji Maharaj told him that when he goes to Gujarat, he must definitely go for Yogiji Maharaj’s darshan. So, on his trip to Gujarat, Muktanand Baba came specially to Gondal for Yogiji Maharaj’s darshan. Upon his first meeting with Yogiji Maharaj, he exclaimed, “Here is a soul fully ripened by love! I feel as much love for you as I felt for my guru. Please place your hands on my head and bless me.”

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Once, Yogiji Maharaj met with the famous orator on the Shrimad Bhagvat, Dongreji Maharaj, and told him, “One day, I want to take out time and listen to your lectures on the Bhagvat.”

Dongreji Maharaj bowed to Yogiji Maharaj and humbly said, “When you are the Bhagvat

itself, of what use are my Bhagvat lectures?” Overcome with emotion before Yogiji Maharaj, who he saw as the embodiment of the Bhagvat, Dongreji Maharaj was unable to speak further.

Another great scholar of the Shrimad Bhagvat Puran, Krishna Shankar Shastri, used to come repeatedly for Yogiji Maharaj’s darshan. He had immense love for Yogiji Maharaj, and he would often say:

“Egolessness is his God-given nature. It is his nature to be accessible to all. Whoever comes to him, whether a child or an intellectual, will invariably come away spiritually richer.

“This is one unique aspect of this great *sant* —no one goes to him to place an offering at his feet, but everyone who meets him takes something away from him. Everyone who comes into his contact leaves with greater faith. Without any effort on their part, they leave with the invaluable gifts of fulfillment, contentment, resolution to virtuous action, resolution for greater satsang, and many other blessings.

“Whenever a *satsangi* leaves from his presence, he feels like he is leaving having just embraced God.”

If one can understand it, in this world, there is no greater gift than the gift of God. It was Krishna Shankar Shastri’s experience that Yogiji Maharaj was constantly giving that most invaluable gift to everyone.

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Until the very end of his life, the renowned Gujarati social worker Ravishankar Maharaj listened to *Yogi Charitam*, a book of inspirational incidents of Yogiji Maharaj’s life. In his typical, unadorned style, Ravishankar Maharaj had explained, “Yogiji Maharaj’s *sattvik* life was pure and unpolluted. That great soul had lived his entire life for the sake of society; that is, he had spent it as a true guide. Just from his darshan, we can see that in his life, he had enjoyed great spiritual bliss.”

Witnessing Yogiji Maharaj’s *brahmic* bliss, the learned sannyasi Kashikanandji had said in

Mumbai, “The Scriptures describe at length the glory of *shabda*-Brahman (the word as Brahman), but I experienced this firsthand listening to Yogiji Maharaj today. Although the language barrier prevents me from understanding much of what he says, there is great spiritual power in his speech.”

The great modern scholar of the Madhva Sampradaya, Bhaktahrudayi Gopal Acharyaji, often came for Yogiji Maharaj’s darshan in Mumbai, where he had once said:

“Just a casual, momentary glimpse of Yogiji Maharaj convinces us that this *sant* walks, talks, and lives his entire life forever immersed in God. He is forever joyful and smiling. Just his single loving glance or his swaying with devotional abandon is enough to fill the heart with profound thoughts and uplifting devotion that purifies and revitalizes the mind. His sparkling eyes, beaming lips, and resplendent countenance grant us the bliss of spirituality.”

One of Gujarat’s towering civic leaders and two-time Chief Minister, Babubhai Jashbhai

Patel, had grown up in a family devoted to the Swaminarayan Sampradaya. While he himself harbored no special affiliation for the Sampradaya, he was a great admirer of Yogiji Maharaj and would frequently come for darshan because, as he explained:

“The thing about Yogiji Maharaj that struck me the most was that he had wholly dissolved his ego. I have met and learned about many great holy men, but rare is the soul who is himself spiritually elevated, possesses a massive following, is the head of a prosperous and expansive institution, and yet who believes himself to be nothing, and who impresses that fact upon others who meet him.

“In this world, you will scarcely be able to meet a holy man who is able to forget his own powers and abilities. The shadow of ego remains impressed upon the heart of one who enjoys the power of his own abilities. But here, we have a soul who has absolutely no ego. He has no ego even of his renunciation.

“He has little of what we might call scholarliness in our modern conception, and his education is minimal; yet, he has personal experience of a liberating philosophy of life that he shares with penetrating impact.

“Even amidst his every action, he maintains an unbroken engagement with God and a remembrance of Shriji Maharaj at the turn of each bead of his *mala*. Such a living faith is rare, indeed.

“He is so humble that those who would be considered insignificant relative to himself, he considers great, treating them with such respect that the opposite person feels that he is smaller than me.

“Everyone experiences the love that rains down from Bapa’s eyes. We have seen this ever-flowing love and compassion embodied in Yogiji Maharaj.

“Between 1967 and 1971, I was the Minister for Civil Supplies and Infrastructure in the state of Gujarat. During that time, a year of scant

monsoon rains led to a low agricultural output that caused me considerable distress regarding the public good. At that time, Yogiji Maharaj told me with great conviction that we would overcome this calamity. And truly, we were able to overcome it.

“Bapa’s greatest achievement is the expansion of the Akshar Purushottam Sampradaya. His extensive travels despite his old age must be credited for the spread of Shriji Maharaj’s message in India and abroad. He has inspired countless dynamic, intelligent, learned, well-to-do youth to renounce the world and become humble sadhus engaged in austerities, social service, and devotion to Shriji Maharaj for the sake of their own liberation.

“In order to make Satsang universal, Bapa spread it amongst children, youths, and everyone, and awakened a sentiment of self-sacrifice in all. He taught everyone the principle of loving self-sacrifice. He sent his devotees amongst the needy, the poverty-stricken, and the tribals for their upliftment.

“In his love, there is no distinction between rich and poor, mine and yours.

“I have seen the following shloka of the Gita alive in Yogiji Maharaj:

Nirmāna-mohā jita-sanga-doshā adhyātmanityā vinivrutta-kāmāha;

Dvandvair vimuktāha sukha-dukha-sangnair gachchhantyamādhāhā padam avyayam tat.

Without arrogance or delusions, with the evils of attachment conquered, with desires turned away, liberated from the dualities known as pain and pleasure, forever spiritual, the undeluded go to that imperishable abode.”

Bhagavad Gita 15.5

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One of the highly intelligent Indian princes, the Thakor of Dhrol, Chandrasinh Bapu, was a great admirer of Yogiji Maharaj, and he often said, “A person like Yogiji is born once in a millennium.”

After this brief taste, we must acknowledge that the countless experiences *satsangis* and non-*satsangis*, named and unnamed, have had with this Param Bhagvat Sant—that river of experiences expands like the infinite, with no end. We will enjoy some of those experiences interspersed in the pages of this text, but they will be mere drops in the ocean that was Yogiji Maharaj.

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