

Chapter 10

Renouncing Vignandas for His Intolerable Persecution of Others

In 1928 (V.S. 1984), Vignandas Swami decided to install a *murti* of his *diskha guru*, Yogeshwardas Swami, in the Rajkot *hari mandir* in contravention of the principles of Akshar Purushottam *upasana*. Shastriji Maharaj tried very hard to dissuade him, explaining, “Although Bhagatji Maharaj was the ideal proponent of Gunatit *jnan*, we still have not installed his *murti* anywhere. So, from where have you conceived of this new idea?”

Indeed, Shastriji Maharaj had previously expressed his unwillingness to allow Vignandas Swami to install the wooden *murtis* of Akshar Purushottam Maharaj in this *mandir*. He had explained, “As long as there are only a handful of sadhus and no fixed income for the mandir, we should not install the *murtis*.” Moreover, although this was a *hari mandir*, Vignandas

Swami was still obsessed with installing the *murti* of Yogeshwardas Swami. So, in one corner of the mandir's loft, he secretly had a sculptor begin sculpting Yogeshwardas Swami's *murti*.

One day, hearing the constant hammering of a chisel on stone, Bhagwatswarupdas Swami said, "What is this constant hammering going on in the loft?" He began to climb the ladder to the loft to investigate. Although he was blind, he slowly and carefully felt his way up the ladder to the loft. As soon as Vignandas Swami heard this, he rushed after Bhagwatswarupdas Swami. Bhagwatswarupdas Swami had reached the top of the ladder when Vignandas Swami firmly grabbed both of his legs from below. Before Bhagwatswarupdas Swami knew what was happening, Vignandas Swami yanked both his legs with all his might. Bhagwatswarupdas Swami lost his balance from the top of the ladder and toppled all the way to the ground with a sickening thud.

Bruised and bloodied, Bhagwatswarupdas Swami began screaming in pain, but his cries were drowned out by Vignandas Swami's roar, "You blind fool! What business do you have poking your nose in what is going on in the loft? Can't you stop your meddling and sit still for once?"

The commotion brought together everyone in the mandir to witness this tragic incident. Yogi Maharaj felt the unbearable agony of this elderly, blind sadhu and was horrified at what had happened. He experienced anguish in every pore of his being upon witnessing this abhorrent deed.

For the past seventeen years, Vignandas Swami had left no stone unturned in persecuting Yogi Maharaj. No normal person would be able to insult, abuse, and beat with such enmity an ideal servant like Yogi Maharaj. But despite being the leader of a *mandal* of sadhus, Vignandas Swami had treated this embodiment of saintliness and ideal disciple, Yogi Maharaj, with absolute inhumanity,

crossing all limits in his persecution. Yogi Maharaj had never uttered a single word of complaint about this to anyone, even in private.

However, many devotees were aware of the situation as they had witnessed it firsthand. Thus, they had repeatedly advised Yogi Maharaj to inform the other devotees so that this intolerable persecution might stop. Yogi Maharaj would simply respond, “Whatever the guru does is for our benefit. Only by understanding this can we progress in satsang.”

As the devotees began to harbor ever-growing affection for Yogi Maharaj, this insanely jealous guru could not bear his own disciple’s greatness. Usually, a guru would be pleased by his disciple’s progress, but here was a guru who became more agitated the more that people praised his disciple. Horrifically, he would express this agitation by mercilessly beating Yogi Maharaj in private.

Once in Sokhada, Vignandas Swami had pushed Yogi Maharaj off the mandir’s terrace into the courtyard below. The 15-foot fall was

enough to fracture a person's bones and possibly even kill them, but Bhagwan Swaminarayan had protected Yogi Maharaj from serious injury. Following this incident, the devotees were furious and decided to do whatever it took to rescue Yogi Maharaj from this brutal persecution.

However, the devotees' agitation dissolved in the face of Yogi Maharaj's conviction, as he had resolved to stand on the summit of tolerance and endure the cruelest tests to which his guru might subject him. Moreover, Yogi Maharaj had staunchly resolved to see only divinity within his guru.

However, Yogi Maharaj could not bear seeing anyone in such pain, and the callousness with which Vignandas Swami had grievously injured this blind, elderly fellow sadhu was the last straw. So, Yogi Maharaj renounced Vignandas Swami and took Bhagwatswarupdas Swami straight to Shastriji Maharaj in Sarangpur, resolving to stay permanently in Shastriji Maharaj's service.

For Yogi Maharaj, Shastriji Maharaj was his guru, his choicest deity, and his everything. From the day in Junagadh that Madhavpriyadas Swami had shared with him the indescribable greatness of Shastriji Maharaj, Yogi Maharaj had decided that he would remain as Shastriji Maharaj's shadow and help fulfill his life's mission. After that, Krishnaji Ada had described Shastriji Maharaj's unfathomable spiritual prowess as a staunch proponent of the *upasana* of becoming Aksharrup and worshiping Purushottam, as the spiritual successor of Pragji Bhakta, and as the current manifest form of Bhagwan Swaminarayan, thus inspiring Yogi Maharaj to take his refuge and remain in his service. Yogi Maharaj's *diksha guru*, Krishnacharandas Swami, had also confirmed these truths. Due to this, a few sadhus had resolved to leave Junagadh and join Shastriji Maharaj. Of the sadhus, Vignandas was senior in age, and he possessed a deep knowledge of the Scriptures. Moreover, he was strict and effective in his

work, and thus he was naturally able to dominate others. Consequently, he became the leader of the group of sadhus who had left Junagadh. Bhagwatswarupdas Swami was blind, whereas Yogi Maharaj was the youngest of the group, and due to his friendly, accommodating disposition, he became an obedient servant of the leader, Vignandas Swami.

Moreover, in the beginning, Shastriji Maharaj had commanded the seven sadhus who had left Junagadh to stay together. Out of a sentiment to serve, Yogi Maharaj would cook everyone's meals, deliver discourses, and be of service to everyone. Thus, Vignandas Swami always kept Yogi Maharaj with him and treated him like a disciple. As it was, Yogi Maharaj behaved as a disciple towards everyone, so it was no surprise that he would behave as a disciple of Vignandas Swami! What was surprising was that Vignandas Swami, who had left Junagadh to become Shastriji Maharaj's disciple, now behaved as Shastriji Maharaj's

equal and Yogi Maharaj's guru. Yogi Maharaj perceived only virtues in everyone. Therefore, if someone had taught him even a single letter, he would never forget that favor and always remain in his obligation.

Vignandas Swami had taken advantage of Yogi Maharaj's meek and accommodating nature and lorded it over him. Remembering and worshiping God were infused in every pore of Yogi Maharaj's being. He would mentally recite Vachanamruts, Swamini Vatos, and kirtans in all his activities.

To establish himself as the guru, the domineering Vignandas sought to instill fear in Yogi Maharaj by browbeating him at every opportunity. He would randomly shout, "Jogi! Why is your mouth closed? Recite the scriptural talks aloud!" This was one of Vignandas Swami's constant refrains. Whether Yogi Maharaj was sweeping or washing utensils, drawing water or preparing food, Vignandas shot orders at him like arrows: "Recite from memory the thirty-third vat of the

third chapter of the Swami Vato... Recite from memory Vachanamrut Gadhada II 9...” And, like a child reciting his multiplication tables, Yogi Maharaj would remember Bhagwan Swaminarayan and recite the Swamini Vato and Vachanamrut’s aloud.

As time progressed, Vignandas Swami established an ever more oppressive grip over this matchless, obedient sadhu. According to his nature, Vignandas Swami punished Yogi Maharaj harshly. But Yogi Maharaj possessed such saintliness that he concealed his spiritual prowess and tolerated everything. Over the years, many devotees wished that Yogi Maharaj might be freed from this tyrant. Even devotees who had affection for Vignandas Swami were fed up with his behavior towards Yogi Maharaj. Incidents of insults, abuses, and beatings had occurred not just once or twice but more than a hundred times. Thus, Yogiji Maharaj had once revealed in private to his disciple Vinu Bhagat (Mahant Swami Maharaj), telling him, “I would let my guru beat me because it made him

happy! If he is pleased by beating us, what do we have to lose? So, I would stand there and take my guru's beatings." After stating this, Yogi Maharaj broke out into laughter and said, "Now, make sure you do not dwell on this."

Due to this constant torture, Shastriji Maharaj had also repeatedly advised Yogi Maharaj to forsake Vignandas. However, to establish the highest ideals of tolerance and forbearance on the spiritual path and to show spiritual aspirants the Gunatit state of an ideal sadhu who tolerated despite possessing great power, Yogi Maharaj endured the violence of Vignandas Swami for seventeen long years. Finally, at guru Shastriji Maharaj's behest, he forsook Vignandas and stayed together with Shastriji Maharaj, who was dearer to him than his own life.

Yogi Maharaj remained in Shastriji Maharaj's presence as his matchless servant. For a long time, the Koh-i-Noor diamond had been confined to a coal mine, but now that it

had come out, its innate brilliance spread far and wide.

For this reason, Shastriji Maharaj kept Yogi Maharaj with him during his travels, including to the cities and villages of Saurashtra, central Gujarat, and Mumbai. Yogi Maharaj's loving service and hospitality delighted the devotees. Perceiving Yogi Maharaj to be complete with all saintly virtues, people used to think that if someone like Yogi Maharaj considered Shastriji Maharaj to be his guru, how great must Shastriji Maharaj be?

Sometimes, mention might be made of Vignandas Swami, and the sadhus might speak of their bitter experiences with him. If Yogi Maharaj was present on such occasions, he would wordlessly get up and leave, but never would he say or listen to a single bad word about Vignandas Swami.

In Vachanamrut Gadhada I 78, Nana Atmanand Swami asks Shriji Maharaj, "How can a person win the affection of all of the

sādhus, just as he has won the affection of the *sādhu* he is presently staying with?”

Shriji Mahārāj replies, “He may leave the person he was previously staying with because he was unable to get along with him, and subsequently go and stay with another person. Despite this, though, he is unable to tolerate others speaking ill of the person he originally stayed with. Thus, all of the *sādhus* feel, ‘This person is not ungrateful. He is a very good *sādhu* because he has not forgotten that he is indebted to the person from whom he has learnt even a little.’ Realising this, all of the *sādhus* like him.”

Yogi Maharaj possessed a very gentle disposition. Thus, he would never speak out against anyone. If someone spoke ill of someone else in his presence, he would put his hands over his ears and walk away. Of all the virtues of a sadhu that Shriji Maharaj has described, this is one of the most remarkable virtues, and it can rarely be found other than in a Gunatit Sant!

Yogi Maharaj never revealed the terrible abuse he had tolerated in the company of Vignandas Swami. He did not allow even a whisper about that topic to pass his lips. If anyone asked him about it, he would either change the subject or cover his ears with his hands, indicating that he was unwilling to speak of or listen to such talks.

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In 1929 (V.S. 1985), Shastriji Maharaj celebrated the festivals of Vasant Panchami and Fuldol in Sarangpur. When Shastriji Maharaj arrived in Sarangpur for the Fuldol festival, Yogi Maharaj was traveling in the villages of Mojidad, Navagam, and surrounding areas within the Jhalavad region. To this *mandal* traveling throughout the region propagating the glory of Akshar Purushottam, Shastriji Maharaj sent a letter from Sarangpur stating, “We will be able to celebrate the festival here only if you send flour.”

At the time, Sarangpur mandir was not financially stable. So when devotees came for

festivals, the organizing sadhus were put into a dilemma of how to feed everyone.

As soon as Yogi Maharaj received Shastriji Maharaj's letter, he traveled to Adval, Kantharia, and the surrounding villages, going house to house begging for alms. He collected 200 kg of flour and returned to Sarangpur by 20 March 1929 (Fagun *sud* 10, V.S. 1985), five days before the festival. Pleased with the effort of his beloved disciple, Shastriji Maharaj got up and said, "Wonderful, Jogi! You worked very hard. We will be able to celebrate the entire festival from this."

The Fuldol celebrations went very well, and all the devotees were extremely pleased.