

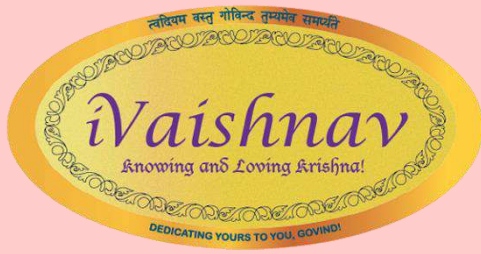
**Logical Answers to Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)  
about Hinduism and PushtiBhaktiMarg...**

# **Why Do We...?**

**Hasmukh Shah**



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Dear Vaishnav:

Jai ShriKrishna.

We all have many questions about the concepts of religious philosophy as well as symbolism and rituals of religious practice that we follow. Unlike science and mathematics, these questions do not have one single right answer. In the field of religion and spirituality one question may have more than one right answer, a symbol or a ritual may have more than one meaning associated with.

This book gives logical answers to frequently asked questions about Hinduism as well as PushtiBhaktiMarg. I hope the answers make sense to the readers.

In the service of Hinduism & PushtiBhaktiMarg,

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## Brief Introduction to PushtiBhaktiMarg

As an integral part of Hinduism and a foremost devotional tradition of Hinduism, Pushti-Bhakti-Marg was established by Shrimad Vallabhacharyaji (ShriVallabh, ShriMahaPrabhuji), a renowned scholar, mystic, Krishna-devotee, and Guru of 16<sup>th</sup> century India. Its followers are known as Vaishnavs.

PushtiBhaktiMarg's Deity is ParBrahm, Parmatma Bhagwan ShriKrishna-as-ShriNathji. PushtiBhaktiMarg recommends two proven methods that a Vaishnav may follow to accomplish three goals...

- 1) Destroy Ego by being unconditionally submissive to Bhagwan Krishna
- 2) Destroy Possessiveness by unquestioningly dedicating self to Bhagwan Krishna
- 3) Learn to offer selfless love-devotion to Bhagwan Krishna without seeking any returns

One method is known as Krishna-Sewa where a devotee may selflessly and lovingly serve a deity of ShriKrishna-as-ShriNathji as their personal God at home every day.

Another method is known as Krishna-Katha where a devotee indulge daily in listening, chanting, and remembering Krishna's names, Krishna's forms, Krishna's virtues and Krishna's Leela (divine games).

A Vaishnav may follow either method to attain the divine experience of Bhagwan Krishna's selfless love.



## CHAPTER - 1

### Why Do We Say 'Namaste or Namaskar' as Greetings...?



Namaste or Namaskar is done by joining our palms together such as fingertips of both hands touch each other while pointing upwards. This gesture is known as “Anjali Mudra” according to Yog tradition which believes that this gesture brings the two halves (hemispheres) of our brain together in harmony that motivates us to be humble and spiritual. This is the reason Anjali Mudra / Namaste / Namaskar is considered a sacred gesture.

Whenever we do and say Namaste/Namaskar to another human being or a pious animal like a cow, we make a profound statement of humility, like “I bow to you”.

Also, Namaste/Namaskar gesture is the most hygienic way of warmly and humbly greeting someone without touching the person in anyway – a handshake or an embrace.

Namaste/Namaskar can be used as a parting greeting too – a way of saying “Bye”.

#### Difference between Namaste and Namaskar...?



Namaste is done and said to the person who is at the same social, religious, spiritual level as we are, such as, friends, colleagues, people of same age, etc.

Namaskar is done and said to the person who is at a much higher social, religious, spiritual level compared to us, such as, elders, teachers, Gurus, leaders, etc.

Namaskar is also offered to God/s. Surya-Namaskar is a yog tradition of respectfully offering a prayer to the Sun God.



## CHAPTER - 2

### Why Do We Say 'Jai ShriKrishna' as Greetings...?

#### ParBrahm, Bhagwan Krishna, The God of Vaishnavs



The founder of PushtiBhaktiMarg, MahaPrabhu Shrimad Vallabhacharyaji reiterated the fact (as cited in Hindu scriptures) that Krishna is ParBrahm, Parmatma - The One Supreme God. He stated this fact with total conviction and utmost faith.

ShriMahaPrabhuji's Philosophy of Pure-Non-Dualism known as "Shuddh-Adwait-Vaad" explains that whatever objects we see around us, including us, are nothing but different forms of ParBrahm Krishna. All human beings, animals, birds, insects, trees, mountain, rocks, oceans, rivers, lakes and all the man-made objects like computers, desks, chairs etc are different forms of Krishna.

ShriMahaPrabhuji further explained that a part of Krishna Himself resides in each object - natural or man-made - of the universe. He also stated that all the objects, including us, are small parts of Krishna who is "The Whole".

#### Why do we say 'Jai ShriKrishna' to other Vaishnavs when we meet them?

As a Krishna devotee, remembering Krishna all day long surely benefits us spiritually on our Path of love-devotion to Krishna. It is necessary that we remember and respect Krishna who resides in the fellow Vaishnavs.

A way to do so is to greet a vaishnav - known or unknown - by saying "Jai ShriKrishna" while putting our palms together in front of our heart.

By doing this, we convey to the fellow Vaishnav "Dear Vaishnav! I greet you with love and respect by bowing down to Bhagwan Krishna who resides in you." We also remind the other Vaishnav of Krishna. The other Vaishnav returns the auspicious greeting by saying "Jai ShriKrishna" to us and reminding us of Krishna.

We can say "Jai ShriKrishna" to anyone anytime, anywhere except ....

#### **Where and When we CANNOT say "Jai ShriKrishna" to another person?**



When in presence of ShriNathji-as-ShriKrishna giving Darshan to us, inside a Temple or at home, we must not say "Jai ShriKrishna" to each other.

The reason why we must not do this is....

We say "Jai ShriKrishna" to remember Krishna. We remember one when one is not physically present in front of us. We do not remember one when one is physically present with us.



ShriKrishna-as-ShriNathji is The Living God for us, the Vaishnavs. When we are doing Darshan of ShriKrishna-as-ShriNathji in Temple or at home He is physically with us. During Darshan, we are in the auspicious presence of our Living God. So, there is no need to remember Him!

That is the reason we must not say "Jai ShriKrishna" to each other during darshan of ShriKrishna-as-ShriNathji in a Temple or at home. This is a Vaishnav protocol.

**Note:** We are NOT committing any sin if, by oversight, we end-up greeting a person with 'Jai ShriKrishna' while in physical presence of Krishna. We are just not observing proper protocol.

### **So, how do we greet each other during Darshan - in Temple or at Home?**

We can greet each other by putting our palms together in front of our heart WITHOUT saying "Jai ShriKrishna".

Also,

By the same reasoning, during Darshan - in Temple or at home,

- we must not bow down to anyone including a Guru or an elderly person
- we must not touch feet of anyone including a Guru or an elderly person
- we must not do 'CharanSparsh' or 'Dandavat Pranaam' to anyone including a Guru

### **To whom we must NOT say "Jai ShriKrishna"?**

We must NOT say "Jai ShriKrishna" to our PushtiBhaktiMarg Guru. The reason is ...

When we say "Jai ShriKrishna" to someone, we remind that person of ShriKrishna.

Guru remembers Krishna all day long and he is the one who taught us to remember ShriKrishna by saying "Jai ShriKrishna".

It would be an egoistic gesture on our part to remind our Guru of Krishna since he/she is the one who taught us do so.

So, greeting a PushtiBhaktiMarg Guru with "Jai ShriKrishna" is NOT a proper etiquette. It will NOT be a proper behavioral protocol for us, the Vaishnavs.

To any other (Non-PushtiBhaktiMarg) Guru or Panditji, we can say "Jai ShriKrishna".

### **How should we greet a PushtiBhaktiMarg Guru?**

We can greet a PushtiBhaktiMarg Guru by saying "Dandvat Pranam" while putting together our palms in front of our heart and bowing down our head towards the Guru.

But remember,

We must NOT say "Dandvat Pranam" to a Guru during Prabhu Darshan in a Temple or at home. In presence of our Living God ShriKrishna-as-ShriNathji, we must NOT bow down to anyone else, even our Guru.



Which one is correct "Jai Shri Krushna" or "Jai Shri Krishna" ?

Both spellings/pronunciations (Krushna or Krishna) are correct.

In Sanskrit and Gujarati languages 'Krushna' is commonly used. In spoken Hindi and Vrajbhasha (and so in English) 'Krishna' is commonly used.

In fact, Krushna/Krishna would not mind how you say His name...!!





## CHAPTER - 3

### Why Do We Chant 'AUM' (ॐ)...?

#### AUM

- ❖ represents the One Supreme Being (ParBrahm) of Sanatan Vedic Dharm (Hinduism)
- ❖ represents the sound energy, the original source energy of the universe
- ❖ is the source of all sounds, all words, all languages that exist in the universe
- ❖ is the most revered one-syllable Mantra of Hinduism
- ❖ is the most basic, Bij (seed) Mantra of Hinduism
- ❖ is at the beginning and at the end of many Mantra
- ❖ is also known as “Pranav” (one that is spoken loudly)
- ❖ is also known as “Omkar” (one that can be chanted)



AUM is explained in many ways.

#### AUM is...

- A represents Brahma, the creative energy (Deity) of the universe
- U represents Vishnu, the preserving energy (Deity) of the universe
- M represents Shiv, the destructive energy (Deity) of the universe

#### AUM is...

- A represents all objects that are form-bound (humans, animals, trees, mountains)
- U represents all objects that are form-less (air, fire, water)
- M represents all types of energy that exists in the universe

#### AUM is...

- A represents the earth (Pruthvi)
- U represents the heaven (Swarg)
- M represents the underworld (Patal)



ParBrahm, Parmatma Krishna declares in the 8<sup>th</sup> verse of the 7<sup>th</sup> chapter of His Bhagvad Gita...  
“I am the AUM in all Vedas”

And He further declares in the 24<sup>th</sup> verse of the 17<sup>th</sup> chapter...  
“Knowers of Vedas chant AUM when commencing the auspicious tasks of performing Yagya, offering charity, or undertaking religious austerity.”

#### Benefits of Chanting AUM

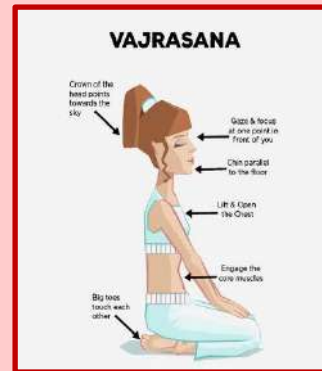
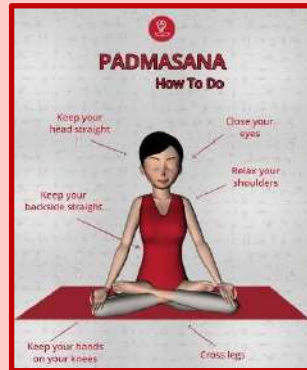
- ❖ The entire universe is perpetually pulsating at the frequency of 432 Hertz. AUM chanting produces the same frequency attaining harmony with the universe. This harmonious union positively affects our body and mind.
- ❖ It creates positive vibrations that purify the surroundings.
- ❖ Its sound helps in attaining a meditative state of mind and induces relaxation.
- ❖ It helps one attain a state of spiritual awareness and Samadhi (absolute bliss).
- ❖ It improves health by lowering blood pressure, increasing immunity, and acquiring self-healing power.

## How to Pronounce AUM...?

Keeping lips pursed (pull together) as if trying to pucker (contract) them and say “Ohhhhhh” and then bring the lips together to make the “mmmm” sound. The result is long “Ohhhhhmmmm”.

Pronouncing AUM in low tone deepens the sensation of the vibrations in the body.

## How to Meditate by Chanting AUM...?



- 1) Select a noiseless, peopleless, distraction-less space.
- 2) If uncomfortable with floor-seating, use chair-seating.
- 3) For floor-seating, seat on a non-electricity-conducting meditation mat so as not to lose the spiritual energy that is generated through earthing by direct contact with the floor/ground.
- 4) For floor-seating, seat in one of the two Yog positions – Padmasana (Lotus Pose) or Vajrasana (Thunderbolt Pose).
- 5) For chair-seating, keep back and head straight and keep hands on the knees with palms open and facing upwards.
- 6) In both types of seating, another option is to keep left hand with open palm on the lap and place right hand with open palm on top of the left hand.
- 7) Turn the eyes downward and close them to avoid all visual images that can distract the mind.
- 8) Initiate deep breathing only through nose and never through mouth.
- 9) Breath normally without using any force.
- 10) Do not clench teeth.
- 11) Inhale and chant “Ohhhmmmm” in gentle tone.
- 12) Hold breath inside, keep silent and mentally count to four.
- 13) Exhale and chant “Ohhhmmmm” in gentle tone.
- 14) Hold breath outside, keep silent and mentally count to four.
- 15) Continue the last four steps as many times as you can.

In addition to Hinduism, AUM and meditation through AUM chanting are very important to Jainism, Buddhism and Sikhism.



## CHAPTER - 4

### Why Do We Chant 'ShriKrishnah Sharanam Mam' (Ashtakshar Mantra)...?

Let us understand what a Mantra is....

Mantra is the means to transport our mind into a serene state of meditation to fulfill an intention with which a specific Mantra is chanted. Like a seed planted with the intention of having a beautiful flower, a Mantra is seed that fulfills the intention when planted in the fertile soil of practice. Chanting Mantra energizes the spiritual state of mind.

- Mantra is created by God himself or one of His beloved sages
- Mantra is a collection of meaningful and powerful words
- Mantra has a very specific meaning and a message
- Mantra can be effective only when recited with complete faith in its words
- Most Mantras have specific sets of rules for reciting them

'ShriKrishnah Sharanam Mam' is a Pushti-Mantra.

It is called 'Ashtakshar Mantra' as it has eight letters (in Sanskrit script).

This Mantra's Guru is Shri VallabhaCharyaji and the deity is ShriKrishna-as-ShriNathji. Its intention is to attain a mental state of total surrender to Bhagwan Krishna.

The meaning of the Mantra is ...

I surrender only to Bhagwan Krishna.

The message of the Mantra is ...

Krishna is my only protector and so I surrender only to Him.

Why do we chant 'ShriKrishnah Sharanam Mam' ?

As Vaishnavs, we worship Bhagwan ShriKrishna. We pray to Child Krishna as He is the most adorable, charming and lovable form of Bhagwan ShriKrishna.

We pray to Bhagwan ShriKrishna, to say one thing to Him...

**“ShriKrishna, I seek protection only from You.”**

As Children, we feel safe with our father because we know that he is powerful enough to protect us and he loves us enough to protect us forever. Similarly, we feel safe with Bhagwan Krishna as He loves us all and He is the most powerful who is willing to protect us all forever.

Note:

The last word of this Mantra must be pronounced as “Mam” and not as “Mamah”. We must remember this.

Another Pushti-Mantra is 'ShriKrushna Tavasmi'.





The meaning of the Mantra is ... I am yours, Bhagwan Krishna.

The message of the Mantra is ... I belong only and only to Bhagwan Krishna.

Why must we belong to Krishna? .... Why do we have to be Krishna's?

When we create something – draw a picture, build a science project – we always say that the picture, the project belongs to us. Bhagwan Krishna has created this universe and everything in it, including us. He also maintains and protects the universe – all of us.

Then, isn't it true that we all belong to Bhagwan Krishna? Of course, It is true!

And so, if we belong to Krishna, why not declare it by chanting...

**“ShriKrishna Tavasmi” ... “I belong to ShriKrishna” ...?**

We must develop a sense of belonging to Bhagwan Krishna before we can say that He is ours. We must offer our selfless love to Krishna before He grants us the divine experience of His love. Gops & Gopis of Vraj did this and so we must do the same to be eligible to experience Krishna's divine love.

**Let us understand what a Mantra-Jap is....**

Repeated chanting ("Jap") of a Mantra is known as "Mantra-Jap".

A Mantra-Jap can be done by using a "Jap-Mala" (Mala = String of beads).

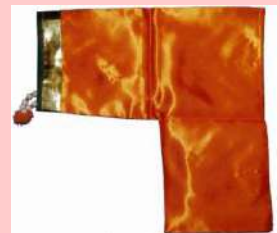


**Let us understand what a Jap-Mala is....**

Tulsi (Basil) plant is considered very pious by Hindus. It has religious as well as medicinal value. A Jap-Mala is prepared by stringing together 108 beads made from stems and branches of Tulsi plants.

A knot is placed in the middle of a Tulsi-JapMala. This knot is known as 'Meru'. The Meru represents the beginning of a JapMala.

The JapMala is usually placed in a silk cloth bag called “Gaumukhi” while using it for reciting the Pushti-Mantras. The reason for this is to protect it from any physical damage as well as to preserve its piousness.



**Let us learn how we can do Pushti-Mantra-Jap using a JapMala...**

There is a prescribed method to recite these Pushti-Mantras.

The method is to recite Pushti-Mantras using a JapMala while seating peacefully in a room all by us without any disturbance – TV, Radio, People – whatsoever.

This method helps us concentrate easily and effectively.

During Pushti-Mantra-Jap using Tulsi-Jap-Mala...

- Tulsi-Jap-Mala must be kept inside a Gaumukhi (if one is available)

- We must hold the Tulsi-Jap-Mala between the thumb and the middle finger of our right hand such that the index finger (first finger after thumb) does not touch the Tulsi-Jap-Mala and the 'Meru' remains on the inside of our palm.
- Then, we should start 'Moving Inward' the beads one at a time while reciting the Mantra silently (without saying it out loud) for each moving bead.
- When the 'Meru' reaches the fingers after all the 108 beads are moved, we should turn the Tulsi-Jap-Mala around to bring the 'Meru' on the inside of our palm. (This is because we are not allowed to "cross-over" the Meru)
- We may recite both the Pushti-Mantras during one round of JapMala OR we can do one round for each of the two above-mentioned Pushti-Mantras.

### **Why are there 108 beads in the Tulsi-Jap-Mala?**

For many reasons, Hinduism considers '108' an auspicious number. Some of them are...

#### '108' is a Harshad (Joy-Giver) number

In Vedic mathematics, the number that is divisible by the sum of its digits is known as Harshad (Harsh = Joy, Da = Give) number.

#### '108' links Earth to Sun and Moon

The average distance between Sun and Earth is 108 times the diameter of Sun.

The average distance between Moon and Earth is 108 times the diameter of Moon.

#### '108' has astrological significance

There are 12 sectors of the Earth's trajectory around the Sun. These sectors are known as Sun signs ('Raashi') in the Sun-Zodiac system. There are nine planets ('Grah') in our solar system. This combination affects our lives in  $(12 \times 9 = 108)$  different ways.

There are 27 sectors of the moon's trajectory around the Earth. These sectors are known as 'Nakshatra'. Each of these Nakshatras are further divided into four parts ('Pad'). Moon stays for about a day in each Nakshatra and goes through all the Nakshatras in each 'Rashi'. This combination also affects our lives in  $(27 \times 4 = 108)$  different ways.

#### '108' has theological significance.

'1' symbolizes Oneness, '0' symbolizes Nothingness and '8' symbolizes Infinity (Completeness). This is the theological description of the Supreme God as per Hinduism. Combination of the above meanings has led the religious Gurus to determine that a Jap-Mala must have 108 beads.

Smaller Jap-Mala can have 54 beads (half of 108), 36 (third of 108), 27 (quarter of 108) or 9 (1/12 of 108). The smaller size is easy to carry along and to handle.

### **Jap-Mala in other religions**

Buddhism (108 beads), Jainism (108 beads), Sikhism (108 beads), Christianity (known as Rosary with 59 beads), Islam (known as Tasbih with 99 beads).

## CHAPTER - 5

### Why Do We Offer Prayer...?

We pray to remember God (Bhagwan).

We remember Him for many reasons ...

To Tell	God how much we love Him
To Thank	God for giving us what we have
To Plead	God for protection
To Request	God to give us what we desire
To Complain	God for the troubles in our lives
To Appeal	God to help someone who needs it
To Accept	God's power and authority
To Seek	God's help

God is the most powerful and He loves us all.

Naturally, we would feel safer knowing that God's power and love will protect us forever.

Each time we remember God out of Thankfulness, Pain, Suffering, Despair, Love, Hope, Happiness – It is a Prayer. A Prayer is our way of letting God know that we love Him and that we wish to be under His protection.

As Hindus,  
we have a tradition of saying a Prayer when we...



- get up in the morning
- go to sleep at night
- begin eating our meal
- leave our home
- begin our journey
- begin an important activity
- celebrate happy occasions like birthdays, weddings
- face sad times due to sickness, death, etc.

And so on .....

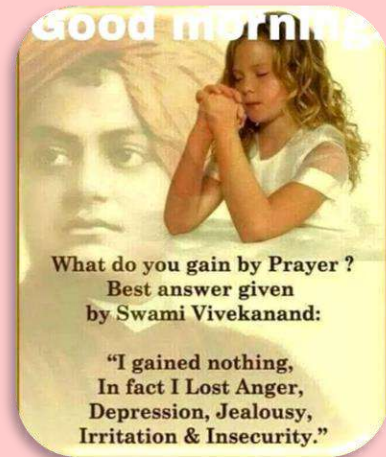
In other words, we have prayers to keep on remembering Bhagwan.

By saying Prayers, we invite Bhagwan in our lives to protect us, to make us fearless, to guide us and to help us become better person.

Prayer is the way we say or chant Bhagwan's name or sing His praise. Every society, every culture, every religion has its own way to remember God.

Prayer could be short or long as length of the prayer does not matter. What matters is our intention to offer a prayer to Bhagwan.

Let us talk about The God of Hinduism that we, the Vaishnavs, must pray.





There seems to be many Gods in Hinduism...! Krishna, Ram, Vishnu, Shiv, Ganesh are few of the many Gods that we hear about.

Is it true that Hinduism has many Gods? ..... **NO. IT IS NOT TRUE.**

Hinduism has **ONLY ONE GOD.**

The One God has many forms and names based on many differing perceptions of the same God by various sages of Hinduism. And so, it seems that there are many Gods in Hinduism.

Hindu scriptures have many common names for The One God, Such as ...

**ParBrahm, Paramatma, Ishwar, Bhagwan**

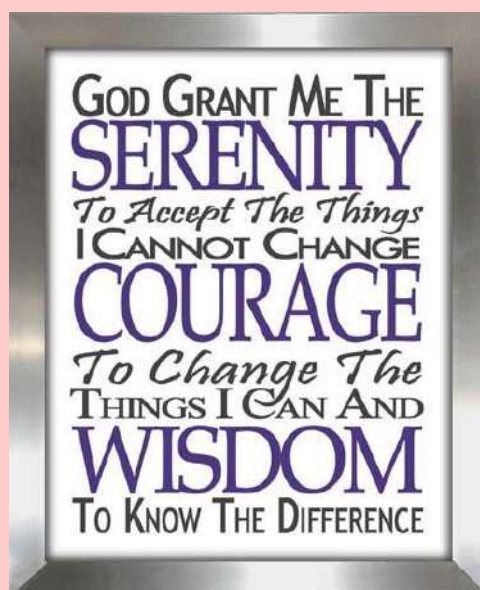
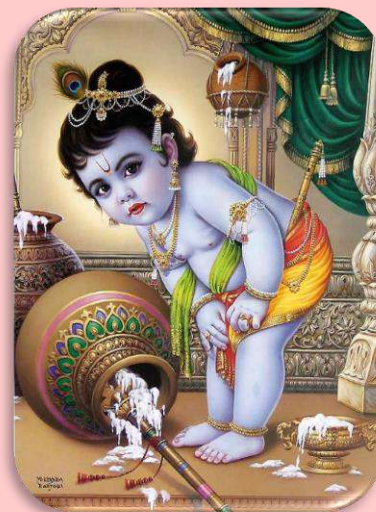
Hindu scriptures known as 'Vedas' have mentioned a proper name for God of Hinduism. That Name is .... **Bhagwan Krishna (Krushna)**

### The Prayer in Pushti-Bhakti-Marg

Bhagwan Krishna is The God of Vaishnavs.

In PushtiBhaktiMarg,  
Vaishnavs pray their Bhagwan Krishna.....

- To adore Him
- To praise Him
- To remember His many playful deeds commonly known as "Krishna-Leela"
- To express Faith, Love, Respect, Devotion for Him
- To seek His protection



## CHAPTER - 6

### Why Do We Worship Tulsi Plant & Wear Tulsi-Mala ...?



"Tulsi" is called "Basil" in English.

The word "Basil" has its roots in a Greek word "Basilikos" which means royal.

Tulsi is called "Vrinda" in Sanskrit.

It is also known as "HariPriya" which means "Beloved of Bhagwan Vishnu and Bhagwan Krishna".

Tulsi is considered Holy and Royal by all Hindus.

#### The Story of Tulsi

Hindu scriptures give many different stories about Tulsi. The most popular story is...

Vrinda (Tulsi) was the daughter of a demon called Nemi and the devoted wife of a demon called Jalandhar. As the one who was born in an ocean, Jalandhar claimed his ownership on the treasures that were found during the great churning of the ocean by the Gods and the demons.

When Jalandhar was killed by Bhagwan Vishnu during a battle, angry Vrinda cursed Bhagwan Vishnu to turn into a stone known as "Shaligram".

Pleased with Vrinda's devotion to her husband, Bhagwan Vishnu granted her a boon that she will take the form of a sacred plant, and her leaves will be used in worship rituals. Since then, Tulsi leaves are added to all meals offered to Bhagwan Vishnu / Krishna /Raam.



Later, Vrinda became a devotee of Bhagwan Vishnu and worshipped Him for years. Pleased with her devotion, Bhagwan Vishnu granted her a boon. She asked to be Bhagwan Vishnu's consort (companion, wife) in her next birth. Bhagwan Vishnu promised her that she will be His consort forever.

#### Tulsi Vivah

To honor Bhagwan Vishnu's promise to Vrinda, Temples of Bhagwan Vishnu and Krishna observe a ritual called Tulsi Vivah. Every year, between the 11<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> day of the first half of the month of Kartik of Hindu year, Tulsi Vivah is celebrated by arranging a wedding between a Tulsi plant and a deity of Bhagwan Vishnu or Bhagwan Krishna or a Shaligram.

#### Medicinal Importance of Tulsi

Tulsi possesses remarkable physical healing properties. Aside from its religious merits, Tulsi has been praised in Indian scriptures and lore since the time of the early Vedas as an



herb that cures blood and skin diseases. Ancient treatises extol it as an antidote for poisons, a curative for kidney disease and arthritis, a preventative for mosquito and insect bites, and a purifier of polluted air. Generally prepared in medicinal teas and poultices, Tulsi's widespread contemporary use in India as an aid to internal and external organs suggests these traditions are based upon practical efficacy. Tulsi's health benefits are described in the books on herbs and Ayurveda.

### Benefits of regularly consuming Tulsi....

- ❖ It acts as a detoxifying, cleansing and purifying agent – both from within and without. Therefore, it is good for skin – both when consumed orally and applied topically. It is also effective in treating skin disorders, itching and issues like ringworms.
- ❖ It has antibiotic, antiviral, antibacterial and anticarcinogenic properties.
- ❖ It provides relief from fever, headache, sore throat, cold, cough, flu and chest congestion.
- ❖ It is beneficial in treating respiratory ailments like chronic bronchitis, asthma, etc.
- ❖ It helps relieve stress, strengthen immunity, and facilitate proper digestion.
- ❖ It is loaded with phytonutrients, essential oils, vitamins A and C.
- ❖ It aids in balancing various bodily processes.
- ❖ It counters elevated blood sugar levels and is therefore beneficial for diabetics.
- ❖ It helps in regulating uric acid levels in body, thereby eliminating risks of developing kidney stones. It is also beneficial for those who have kidney stones.
- ❖ It can ward off harmful effects of free radicals.
- ❖ It is great for dental health and for healthy gums.
- ❖ It is an effective insect repellent and can aid in treating insect bites.
- ❖ It is beneficial in treating hepatitis, malaria, tuberculosis, dengue and swine flu.

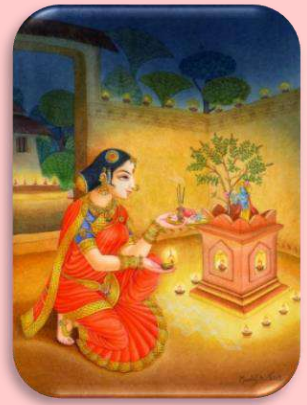
### How to Consume Tulsi...?

- ❖ Consume it raw, pluck it fresh from the plant, add it in your tea, make soup out of it or make powder or paste for later use.
- ❖ Apart from the conventional ways of consuming the holy basil, you can experiment with it in your cooking and add an exquisite, earthy, aromatic flavor to your preparations.



In Hinduism...

- ❖ Tulsi is planted in the front yard of a Hindu home
- ❖ Tulsi is worshipped daily with utmost faith
- ❖ Tulsi leaves are placed in all meals offered to Bhagwan Vishnu/Krishna/Ram
- ❖ A necklace of beads (Tulsi Mala) made from stems and branches of Tulsi plant, is worn by devotees of Bhagwan Vishnu/Krishna/Rama
- ❖ A string of beads (Tulsi-Jap-Mala) made from the stem of Tulsi plant is used in worshipping of Bhagwan Vishnu/Krishna/Rama



### Other Plants Used in Hindu Rituals

PLANT	USAGE
Aasopalav Leaves	Used as garland or in a Kalash for auspiciousness
Mango Leaves	
Banana Leaves	Used in as a plate to offer meals to Gods
Darbh (Kush) Grass	Used as a placemat for seating (Darbh-Aasan)
Durva Grass	Used for Ganesh worship
Jackfruit tree	Used as firewood for Yagya (in South India)
Peepal Leaves	Used in Poojan
Peepal Tree	Being worshipped (It is the only tree that releases oxygen at night - so it is considered auspicious)
Sandalwood	Used in Poojan, Yagya altar, funeral pyre, adorning forehead
Shamee Tree	Being worshipped on the day of Dashhara (Dashera) - the day of victory of Ram over Ravan (good over evil)
Sugarcane	Yagya, Festivals

### Significance of Tulsi in PushtiMarg



Tulsi, being "HariPriya – Beloved of ShriKrishna", has a special place in PushtiBhaktiMarg. In PushtiBhaktiMarg,

- ❖ Tulsi leaves are placed in the meals offered to ShriKrishna-as-ShriNathji
- ❖ Tulsi twinleaves ("Tulsi-Dal"), symbolizing two aspects of love (Togetherness and Separation) is offered by Vaishnavs at the feet of ShriKrishna-as-ShriNathji
- ❖ Tulsi-Dal is given in the right hand of a Vaishnav by a Pushti-Guru during the PushtiBhaktiMarg's BrahmSambandh Mantra initiation ritual

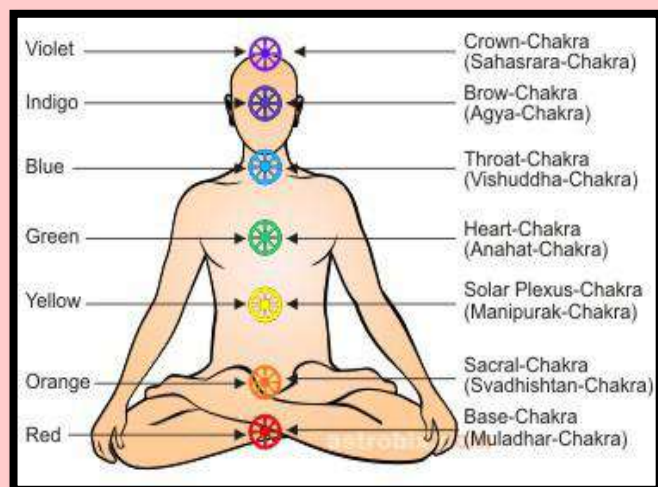
- ❖ Tulsi-Dal is kept in the right hand while reciting BrahmSambandh Mantra in presence of ShriKrishna-as-ShriNathji
- ❖ One or two TulsiMala (small beads) is always worn around the neck by a Vaishnav
- ❖ Tulsi-Jap-Mala (large beads) is used in reciting Pushti Mantras by a Vaishnav
- ❖ Tulsi Vivah is celebrated every year in PushtiBhaktiMarg Temples





## CHAPTER - 7

### Why Do We Wear Tilak or Bindi on Forehead ...?



#### The Seven Energy Centers of A Human Body

According to the ancient Hindu scriptures, human being's body has seven "Chakras" (Discus, Disk, Wheel).

Each Chakra is an energy center that filters and gathers the energy around us and disperses it throughout our body by passing it through other Chakras with help from "Nadis" (a channel) and "Pran" (Life-Force).

These seven chakras are located as follows...

No	Chakra	Represents	Location
1	Base - Root - <i>Mulaadhaar</i>	Survival	Base of Spine
2	Sacral - <i>Svaadhistaan</i>	Pleasure	Lower Abdomen
3	Navel - Solar Plexus - <i>Manipur</i>	Power	Navel
4	Heart - <i>Anaahat</i>	Love	Heart
5	Throat - <i>Vishuddha</i>	Communication	Throat
6	Brow - Third Eye - <i>Aagya</i>	Insight - Intuition	Center of Forehead
7	Crown - Lotus - <i>Sahasra</i>	Spirituality	Top of Head

In the context of "Tilak & Bindi" our interest lies in the "Aagya" Chakra.

#### AAGYA Chakra

Aagya Chakra also known as the Third Eye Chakra is in the center of the forehead, just above the brows and in the area between the two eyes. Aagya Chakra is represented as 2-petal lotus. It relates to our insight and imagination. It further relates to intuitive knowledge of people. It involves balancing our higher (Spiritual) Self and lower (Physical) self.

The "Third Eye" of Bhagwan Shiv corresponds to the Intuitive Knowledge.

The spot of Aagya Chakra is where the pineal gland exists. When this gland is activated, it can lead to heightened senses of intuition, clarity of thought, and an increased awareness of one's surroundings.

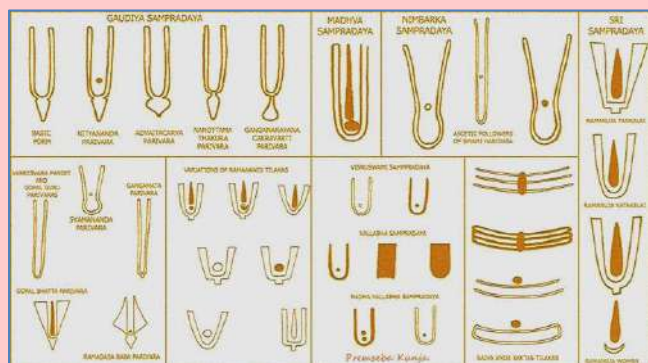
Aagya Chakra is the place where we wear a TILAK or a BINDI.

#### TILAK

Tilak is a mark of auspiciousness. Wearing a Tilak on Agya Chakra symbolizes the spiritual eye (The Third Eye). When a human being attains spirituality, his Third Eye opens to destroy his three types of Karma (Accumulated (*Sanchit*), Future (*Prarabdh*) and Present



(Kriyaman). Then his three forms – Physical, Spiritual and Divine – merge to evolve a Divine form. This is a Hindu Sanatan Vedic Dharm’s understanding of a Tilak.



There are many styles of Tilak. The style signifies a certain Spiritual path - different faiths of Vaishnavism or Shaivism. Sometimes Tilak signifies the level of knowledge or Spirituality of a person.

**Wearing a Tilak**

A Tilak can be worn using the ring finger (“Anamika”) as it signifies harmony. One

should be careful that the fingernail is not used while applying Tilak. No other fingers or thumb should be used. (Some people use a thumb for mere convenience)

Tilak can also be applied using a wooden or metal stamp.

The different styles of a Tilak are....

- |              |  |
|--------------|--|
| Tripundra    | Three horizontal parallel lines across the entire forehead |
| Urdhvpundra  | “U” shape in the center of the forehead between two eyes   |
| Bindi        | A dot in the center of the forehead                        |
| Ardh-Chandra | Half-moon shape in the center of the forehead              |

The different materials used for a Tilak are....

- Sandal paste (Chandan) ...symbolizing purity and tranquility
- Sacred ashes (from Yagya or Havan) ...symbolizing dedication, devotion
- Kumkum (Red powder) ...symbolizing power, vigor, stability
- Turmeric (Haldi) ...symbolizing wealth, fortune, prosperity

**BINDI**

Bindi on the Aagya Chakra carry the same meaning as the Tilak. Normally, men wear Tilak and women wear Bindi.

A Bindi on a woman’s forehead also signifies that she is a married woman (as per Hindu tradition).



Traditionally, Kumkum (red powder) is used for Bindi.

Nowadays, many females (married or unmarried) wear Bindi of many colors mostly matching their attire of the day. They wear Bindi as part of their dressing up.

**TILAK & BINDI in PushtiBhaktiMarg**

In PushtiBhaktiMarg a Tilak represents the pious feet of ShriKrishna-as-ShriNathji. PushtiBhaktiMarg accepts that all Vaishnavs are the subjects of Krishna. It accepts

ShriKrishna-as-ShriNathji as the Master (“Swami”) of the Vaishnavs and the Vaishnavs are the subjects (“Sevak”) of Krishna.



Wearing Tilak/Bindi symbolizing the pious feet of Krishna on the forehead (Agya Chakra) signifies the fact that a Vaishnav accepts the sovereignty of Bhagwan Krishna and is willing to follow all His wishes and commands.

Vaishnavs adorn the Tilak with some symbols using yellow-colored sandal paste or “Gopi-Chandan” (paste made with sandal powder and the clay from Gopi Lake near the holy city of Dwarka) as if they are adorning Krishna's pious feet on their forehead.

Vaishnav women wear “Bindi” for the same reasons.

### Why ShriKrishna-as-ShriNathji wears a Tilak on His forehead...?

Vaishnavs accept ShriKrishna-as-ShriNathji as their Master and so wear the Tilak representing His feet to signify their dedication to Him.

Similarly, ShriKrishna-as-ShriNathji accepts His consort Radhaji (“Swaminiji”) as His Master and wears a Tilak representing Her feet to signify His dedication to Her.

(Note: Will any man do that - accept his wife as his 'Master'...?!!)



## CHAPTER - 8

### Why Do We Light a Lamp as Part of Worship ...?



Lamp signifies Light, Fire, Illumination.  
Lamp symbolizes knowledge.

Knowledge illuminates our intellect and removes our ignorance, just like light removes the darkness.

Hinduism believes that God is omniscient. God is total Knowledge and the only source of all the knowledge that we know and all the knowledge that we do not know.

In almost all Hindu homes, lighting a lamp is part of the worshipping rituals.

Hindus have a practice of lighting a lamp to mark an auspicious beginning of any task, any endeavor, any venture, any celebration.

Light fills the space without really "filling" the space.

True spiritual Knowledge, too, fills our inner space without crowding it with unnecessary thoughts, information and helps our journey to God. We bow down to a lighted lamp and for the same reason we bow down to the true knowledge.

A lighted lamp lights up many lamps without diminishing itself. Similarly, a knowledgeable person makes others knowledgeable without losing an iota of knowledge that he/she has. As such, by distributing knowledge, it bounds to increase multifold. The transfer of knowledge benefits both the giver and the receiver.

When the fuel (Ghee or oil) runs out, the lighted lamp burns out while keeping on lighting the space around it. If each one of us lived like a lighted lamp, the world would be a different place -- a place without grief, misery, quarrels, fights, battles, wars...!



A lamp shows the way of Knowledge...  
A lamp shows the way of Humanity...  
A lamp shows the way of Spirituality...

While lighting a lamp, we recite a Shlok...

**Deep-Jyoti-hi ParBrahm, Deep-ha Sarva-Tamopahah  
Deepen Sadhya-Te Sarvam, Sandhyaa Deepo Namostu-Te**

The shlok means ... I bow down to the Lamp; whose light is the knowledge-Incarnate (God), which removes the darkness of ignorance and by which all can be achieved in life.



There is an interesting story about a Lamp...

Long ago, a King had three sons. He loved them all and so could not decide whom to hand over the kingdom so that his kingdom would flourish even after he is gone. Once a Sage came to his kingdom and the King sought his advice. Sage promised to help the King choose his successor. The sage summoned the three princes. They each lived in their own palaces. Sage gave each one of them 1000 rupees and asks them to fill the entire living room of their individual palaces. He gave them a week to do so.

At the end of the week, the sage and the King set out to visit each of the princes.

First, they went to the oldest prince's palace. A very bad smell that surrounded the whole palace greeted them. The oldest prince conferred with his friends and decided to buy cheap dirt to fill the living room. And the dirt was causing the bad smell.

Then they went to the middle prince's palace. There was some kind of sweet but not-so-good smell all around. The middle prince also conferred with his friends and decided to buy the flower petals to fill the living room.

Disappointed with his two older princes, the King went to the third prince's palace along with the Sage. The youngest son did not do anything for most of the week. Everyone was wondering whether he was doing anything to meet the challenge. Everyone was sure that he would lose the contest. When the Sage and the King arrived at his palace, the youngest prince asked them to wait for a few minutes. When the youngest prince called them into his living room, there was nothing but a few lamps lighting the whole room. The room was filled with LIGHT from the lamps.

The youngest prince knew the value of the Lamp and the Light! He was the chosen one.

### In PushtiBhaktiMarg,



There is no practice of lighting a lamp in front of ShriKrishna-as-ShriNathji. Vaishnavs accept and serve/love Him as a living God. For them, He is a 7-year young child. A live fire/flame is normally kept away from a child and so no lamp is lit near Krishna. Offering of Aarti (with live flame) happens at a distance and only for a few minutes at a time.

**Note:** Western cultural tradition is to light a candle and then extinguish it to mark a celebration like birthday, wedding etc. Many Hindus criticize this tradition since Hindus believe in lighting a lamp, not extinguishing it. There is not right or wrong way here. They are just different traditions. Lighting/extinguishing a birthday cake candle may still be explained as representative of mortality of life - in one's life year begins and ends just like a candle - a birthday is reminder of a new year as well as the year that went by.

## CHAPTER - 9

### Why Do We Offer Aarti as Part of Worship...?



The word "Aarti" has its roots in a Sanskrit word "Aart" that means longing.

Traditionally it is offered to God in a Temple or home. Many times it is offered to a Guru, elderly people, scholars as a sign of respect.

Aarti is made up of several cotton wicks, soaked in oil or clarified butter (Ghee), arranged on a specially crafted plate of metal or clay. A priest or a devotee holds the lighted Aarti in the right hand (or both hands) and moves it in a clockwise circular movement to illuminate the entire form of the deity.

The devotees can behold the beauty of each limb of the deity in their eyes, heart and mind to experience the divine energy radiating from the deity. Offering of an Aarti is usually accompanied by devotional singing, chanting, bellringing, handclapping etc. This divine ambience intensifies the devotion of the devotees.



Aarti is often offered by burning camphor instead of cotton wicks. When burned, Camphor does not leave any residue behind. Camphor Aarti is symbolic of destroying one's ego. Just like camphor, one destroys one's ego without leaving any trace of it while offering oneself to the Deity.

Aarti is part of the sixteen-Step pooja ritual (Shodash-Upachhar). It is also called an auspicious light ("Mangal Nirrajan").

#### **Significance of Aarti in Hinduism**

In Hinduism, Bhagwan (God) is the ultimate source of all types of energy. Some believe that God Himself is an Energy. When Aarti is offered, the flame is believed to receive the divine energy emanating from the deity.



At the conclusion of an Aarti, the Aarti flame either is placed in a convenient location or is circulated among the devotees. The devotees hold their hands over the Aarti flame and then gently touch their eyes and the top of their head. This gesture is commonly known as receiving "Aashaka" (Blessing). Through Aashaka, the devotees feel blessed by the divine energy of the deity since the Aarti flame is believed to contain the Deity's divine energy.

## Significance of Aarti in PushtiBhaktiMarg



As per PushtiBhaktiMarg philosophy, Aarti symbolizes the longing of a devotee for ShriKrishna-as-ShriNathji. The flame represents devotee's anguish of separation from Krishna and the burning desire to meet Him again. Devotees wish to offer such anguish to ShriKrishna-as-ShriNathji as a symbol of their intense love for Him.

Aarti in PushtiBhaktiMarg symbolizes Vaishnav's offering of the self and the love filled devotion to ShriKrishna. So, the ritual of receiving "Aashaka" is not observed in PushtiBhaktiMarg Temples as Aarti represents 'offering' to God and not 'blessing' of God.

The exception to above norm is the main Temple of PushtiBhaktiMarg, The ShriNathji Temple of Nathdwara (Rajasthan, India). This is because in addition to being a PushtiBhaktiMarg Temple, it is considered a Hindu Temple, representing PushtiBhaktiMarg in Hinduism.

Another exception is The ShriNathji Temple at Vraj (Pennsylvania, USA) as it is the only other duly accredited ShriNathji Temple in the world.

No other Pushti Temple (Haveli) offers "Aashaka" of the Aarti that is offered to ShriKrishna-as-ShriNathji.

Note: For the same reason, ShriNathji Temples in Nathdwara as well as Vraj hoist flag (Dwaja) on top of the temples. Other PushtiBhaktiMarg Temples do not hoist flags.

In PushtiBhaktiMarg Temples, Aarti is offered to ShriKrishna-as-ShriNathji four times a day. Each instance of Aarti carries a specific meaning in addition to the common meaning as explained above.

### Mangala Aarti

Aarti is offered to symbolize the banishing of the ill effects of evil spirits that may have been hovering over in the Temple through the night before.

### Rajbhog Aarti

Aarti is offered as an expression of Gopis' love for Krishna.

### Sandhya Aarti

Aarti is offered to symbolize the banishing of the ill effects of evil spirits that may have been lurking in the forests where Krishna was grazing His cows during the day.

### Shayan Aarti

Aarti is offered as an expression of Krishna and His beloved Swaminiji's (Radha's) romantic feelings.

Note:

At Vraj Temple, Aarti is also offered during Shringar Darshan if Palana Manorath Darshan coincides with Shringar Darshan.



Unlike Hindu Temples, PushtiBhaktiMarg has no tradition of singing specific Aarti-song. Only Aarti specific Kirtans as written by 'AshtaSakha' devotee-poets are sung during Aarti.

In Hindu Temples, Aarti-plate is moved clockwise accompanied by clockwise and anticlockwise movement at top and bottom of a cycle symbolizing offering of respect as well as receiving of blessings.

In Pushti Temples, Aarti-plate is moved only in clockwise manner symbolizing offering of love and respect without seeking/receiving anything in return.

### Bellringing and Drumbeating during Aarti

Hindu Temples have a tradition of announcing Aarti event by bellringing and drumbeating to invite devotees to have much better Darshan in the light of the Aarti flames. Same music continues during the offering of the Aarti.

PushtiBhaktiMarg follows this tradition to an extent.

Only ShriNathji Temple of Nathdwara has a 'Nagar-Khana' (Drum-Venue) outside of the Temple to announce Rajbhog Darshan. Inside all the Pushti Temples, only the ringing of 'Zalar' (hammering of a brass plate with wooden mallet) is allowed during Aarti time.



## CHAPTER - 10

### Why Do We Revere Swastik ...?

The Sanskrit word “Swastik” is a combination of two roots words – “Su” means well (good) and “Asti” means is (It is). Swastik was originated in Bharat (India) and it is believed to be as old as Hinduism (Sanatan Vedic Dharm) itself, meaning it is more than 10,000 years old. Swastik is Hinduism’s revered sacred symbol that is believed to bring good luck, success, prosperity to individuals and families. Hindu families draw Swastik on the threshold of the main entrance of their homes. All Hindu religious rituals require presence of Swastik in some form.



Swastik is a right-faced symbol. One starts drawing it from the top-right corner, ending at the bottom-left corner, and then starts from the top-left corner, ending at the bottom-right corner. The four dots may or may not be there. Swastik is usually drawn using a red-colored powder known as “Kumkum” or “Kanku”.

Different meanings are associated with a Swastik.

Four parts of the two straight lines forming a cross symbolize four human pursuits (Purusharth) known as Dharm (Morality), Arth (Security), Kaam (Pleasure), and Moksh (Liberation). The cross-point of the two lines is associated with the Supreme Being (ParBrahm). The four curving lines symbolize four types of liberation (Moksha). The curving line at the bottom represents “Salokya Moksha” meaning being in the same abode as ParBrahm. The curving line at the right represents “Samipya Moksha” meaning being in the close company of ParBrahm. The curving line on the left represents “Sarupya Moksha” meaning having a form like ParBrahm. The curving line at the top represents “Sayujya Moksha” meaning merging with ParBrahm.

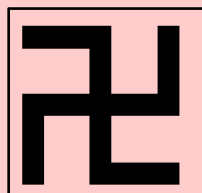


Swastik is believed to graphically represent the four different positions of a 7-star formation known as Saptrishi (the Big Dipper (USA, Canada) or Plough (UK, Ireland)) around a major

non-moving, stable star known as Dhruv (North Star) during the four seasons of a year as shown in the picture.

Saptarshi star formation represent Hinduism's seven eminent sages, namely, Vishwamitra, Vashishtha, Bharadwaj, Atri, Gautam, Kashyap, and Jamadagni as cited in Hindu scripture Brihadaranyaka Upanishad.

Swastik is an integral part of Ashta-Mangala. It is an age-old Hindu Tradition wherein eight sacred symbols are offered to Gods on various auspicious occasions. These symbols may differ from region to region, but Swastika is a common feature along with other symbols like Conch/Shell, Lotus, Wheel, Kalasha, Dhwaja (Flag or Banner), Matsya (fish), Elephant, Bull, Sinh (Lion), etc.



The left-facing Swastik is called "Sauvastika". It represents night and is used in Tantrik rituals while worshipping Goddess Kali.

Swastik is a sacred symbol for Jainism, Buddhism, and Sikhism as well. Swastik is also used as a sacred symbol bearing different names in many cultures, such as, ancient Greek, ancient Druids, celts, Nordic and in many countries, such as, England, China, Japan, Greece.



Adolf Hitler of Germany used a tilted Swastik as a Nazi symbol that came to symbolize oppression and annihilation. Today, this symbol continues to be associated with Nazism, antisemitism, and white supremacism.

This is reason why Hindu families living outside of India are skeptical about publicly displaying their revered Swastik.





## CHAPTER - 11

### Why Do We Use Certain Objects in Hindu Worship Rituals...?

Every religion has objects that are essential to worship and other religious rituals. These objects symbolize certain norms, principles, omens, etc. Over the years, followers of a religion tend to forget the exact meaning of these objects but keep on using them anyway. Hinduism makes extensive use of such objects that are considered holy by Hindus.

#### COCONUT (*SHRIPHAL, NARIYAL*)



As per Hinduism scriptures, our head symbolizes our ego. Coconut symbolizes the human head because of its shape and the hard shell. So, as part of religious rituals, a coconut is broken symbolizing breaking of our ego. Coconut's soft kernel represents the mind, and the water represents mind's desires.

Coconut is an integral part of ritualistic worship as well as several other auspicious events.

#### KALASH (HOLY WATER-POT)

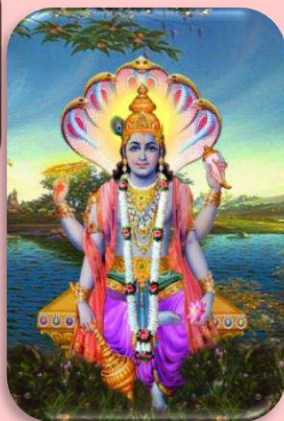


Kalash is a water pot made from brass, copper, silver, gold or earth. It is filled with clean water and Water-God (*VarunDev*) is invited to sanctify the water to be used in religious rituals. Kalash is normally adorned with Swastik and/or Aum symbols.

When kalash is adorned with mango leaves and coconut it is called *Purna-Kalash* (*Purna-Kumbh, Purna-Ghat*) that symbolizes abundance and a source of life.

Water-God "*VarunDev*" (using *Purna-Kalash*) and Fire-God "*AgniDev*" (using the lighted altar) must be present to witness, sanctify, and certify a Hindu wedding ritual.

#### CONCH (SHANKH)



As per Hinduism scriptures, Shankh is the giver of prosperity, fame and longevity. It also cleanses sins. It is used in many religious rituals such as Panchamrut Snan (bathing deity with five nectars - Milk, Curd, Honey, Sugar and Ghee). A conch is sometimes decorated with religious images. In Hindu temples, conch is used as a trumpet. The deep and booming sound of conch fills devotees' minds with devotion for God.

In ancient times, conch was used in battles to issue various commands.

Conch is one of the objects in Bhagwan Vishnu's four hands along with discus (*chakra*), mace (*gada*) and lotus (*padma*).

### **BETEL NUT (SOPARI) & BETEL LEAF (PAAN)**



Betel nut is used in many religious rituals to represent different Gods. In a ritual, Gods like Ganesh, Vishnu, Nine Planets (Nav-Grah) are invoked and invited to bless the ritual.

A Brahmin Pandit humbly invokes and worship a deity in a betel nut by reciting Mantras, place the betel nut on a clean betel leaf, adorn with flower petals and red powder (kumkum), offer red-white cotton thread (nada-chhadi) as cloths, offer jaggery, rock sugar, dry nuts, fruits as meal (bhog). After Pooja is completed, the deity is humbly requested to return to his/her abode (home).

Betel nut is used in rituals because it is one whole, seedless hard nut that cannot be cut or crushed easily. A perfect thing to represent Gods.

In daily life, betel nut and betel leaf are used as mouth freshener and digestive aid after a meal.

A collectible variety of betel nut cutters are available in many parts of India.

### **RICE (AKSHAT)**



Rice and wheat are both used in many religious rituals. Even though both grains represent abundance and wealth, rice is used more often than wheat because it is white, and one-piece (Akshat) grain and it cannot be broken in two separate parts like wheat.

Rice is considered auspicious in many cultures around the world in addition to Hinduism.

### **NADA-CHHADI (Auspicious Thread-Bracelet)**



The auspicious thread-Bracelet known as Nada-Chhadi is made of red and white/yellow cotton threads. It symbolizes a divine promise of protection and the well-being of a person on whose right hand it is tied. It is tied by a priest in a Temple, a Panditji at weddings or a Guru at a holy event.

## KAMAL (Lotus)

Kamal or Padma (Lotus) grows out of the mud in a lake or a pond. Even though lotus is rooted in mud and water (clean or dirty), it is unblemished by either of them. Water falling on the lotus does not even wet it. Lotus forever remains clean.



Thus, nothing, good or bad, sticks to lotus. Lotus remains unaffected and keeps on spreading its fragrance.

This attribute of lotus makes it a flower that symbolizes piousness, holiness, auspiciousness.

This is the reason...

...why pictures and idols of many Gods and Goddesses are shown holding lotus in hand.

...why lotus flower is offered to Gods and Goddesses

...why ShriNathjiBawa keeps lotus in her right hand

...why different parts of God's or Goddess's body are compared to lotus such as, lotus-feet (lotus-like pious feet), lotus-hands (lotus-like pious hands), lotus-eyes (lotus-like pious eyes), etc.

## BILI (BILVA) PATRA (Bili Leaf)



The trifoliate Bili leaf is symbolic of the three eyes of Bhagwan Shiv who has the third eye of knowledge in the center forehead. That is the reason why these leaves are offered to Bhagwan Shiv during His pooja. The leaves are showered on Shiv-ling as part of the worship of Bhagwan Shiv.



## BHASHMA (HOLY ASH)



Bhashma comes from the altar of a Yagya that burns purified wood along with materials like Ghee, grain and herbs.

Fire is believed to purify objects by burning. Thus, the ash from Yagya altar is considered pure and auspicious.

Bhagwan Shiv is known to wear Bhashma Tilak and smear bhashma all over his body. As part of the worship, a Bhashma tilak is applied to a Shiv-ling.



Devotees of Shiv, especially Sadhus (ascetics), wear Bhashma Tilak (normally three horizontal lines on the forehead). Many Sadhus smear the holy ash all over the body to get purified. Along with orange color wrap-around cloth, wearing holy ash on the body has become an identity of a Sadhu - a spiritual person who has denounced his worldly ties - in India.



## RUDRAKSH

Rudraksh means Bhagwan Shiv's Eye. Rudra is another name of Shivji. Legend is that Rudraksh came from the third eye (of knowledge) of Bhagwan Shiv.



This is the reason devotees of Shivji wear a necklace of rudraksh beads around their neck and as a bracelet around their forearm. They also use a Japmala of 108 rudraksh beads to chant Bhagwan Shiv's Mantra "Aum Namoh Shivayah".

Rudraksh is believed to shield the wearer against evil spirit. It is also believed to increase the spiritual energy of the wearer.



Rudraksh beads are categorized by the number of faces ('Mukh') it has. The portion between the two natural cuts going from top to bottom of the bead (like longitude of earth) is called a 'Mukh' of rudraksh. The rudraksh shown in the picture here has eight faces and so it is called 'Ashta-Mukhirudraksh'. Ek (one) Mukhi rudraksh is rare while Panch (five) Mukhi rudraksh is found in abundance.

It is said that Rudraksh necklace or Japmala must be made using cotton thread and never any metal (gold, silver, copper, brass) wire. The metal is believed to nullify rudraksh's medicinal and spiritual effects.



## JANOI – JANEU (Sacred Thread)



Janoi (Sacred Thread) is also known as Tagnopavit or Upvit. It is made from three white cotton threads. It is worn across the chest going from right shoulder to the left side of the waist.

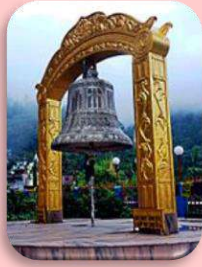
Normally Brahmins wear Janoi. But other social classes -- Kshatriya (warriors) as well as Vaishyas (Merchants) are supposed to wear Janoi too.

Brahmin children go thru a special religious ceremony to begin wearing Janoi. The ceremony is known as Upnayan Sanskaar. It is one of the sixteen sacraments of a Hindu male's life. It marks the beginning of an education period of a child.

The three threads represent three Goddesses - Gayatri (Goddess of Intellect), Saraswati (Goddess of Wisdom) and Savitri (Goddess of Virtues). The wearer is reminded by the Janoi to be pure and pious in thought, words and deeds. The three threads are reminder of one's three kinds of debts - to parents, to Guru and to community.



## GHANTA (Temple Bell)



The melodious ringing of the Temple bell during Aarti or Pooja is pleasing to the minds of the devotees. The bell is hung in the entrance of many Temples for devotees to ring it on entering the Temple. The ringing of the bell helps the devotees to un-stuck their minds from the outside world and get ready to immerse into the spiritual atmosphere of the Temple. The Temple bells are usually made of bronze or bronze mixed metals.



In **PushtiBhaktiMarg Temple**, bells are not hung for devotees to ring for a reason. Vaishnavs worship-serve-love a living God - ShriKrishna-ShriNathji. Since He is a living God residing in Vaishnav Haveli (Temple), he would not like constantly ringing bell. Who among us would prefer the constantly ringing doorbell in our own home?

Ringling of the bell is permitted only during Aarti in Vaishnav Havelis.

## MURTI or SWAROOP (Not an Image, an Idol, an Icon or a Statue)



Murti is an embodiment of God. A statue of stone or metal or any other material is created and then reciting Vedic Mantras, God is invoked (*Pran-Pratishtha*) into the statue. Thus, the statue do not remain statue any more. It gets transformed as Murti. One cannot call Murti, an Image-Idol-Icon-statue. Murti is accepted as their God by the devotees.

In PushtiBhaktiMarg, God's Murti is called Swaroop (His own form) as Vaishnavs worship/serve/love their living God - ShriKrishna-ShriNathji.

## SHALIGRAM



Shaligram is a sacred, almost oval-shaped black stone found in the riverbed of Gandaki river in Nepal. Shaligram is a representation of Bhagwan Vishnu. Shaligram is worshipped by Vishnu devotees who do not wish to worship a Murti or a Swaroop. Shaligram does not have to be sanctified (*Pran-Pratishtha*) before worshipping like in case of Murti or Swaroop.

In PushtiBhaktiMarg Temples, Shaligram is seated next to ShriNathji Swaroop.

## SHIV-LINGA



Shiv-Linga represents Bhagwan Shiv. Devotees of Bhagwan Shiv worship Him in two forms: His Murti and His Shiv-Linga. The three white lines on Shiv-Linga is a kind of Tilak and is known as 'Tripund'.

Shiv-Linga is usually made of stone (mostly black). It can be made of metal, glass, crystal, clay etc.

The base of the Shiv-Linga is called 'Brahma-Bhag' representing Bhagwan Brahma, the Creator of universe. The middle part is known as 'Vishnu-Bhag' representing Bhagwan Vishnu, the Sustainer of universe. The top cylindrical part is known as 'Rudra-Bhag' representing Bhagwan Shiv.

Shiv-Linga can be man-made or natural. The most famous natural Shiv-Linga is formed out of ice every year in the cave of Amranath in the snowy mountains of the Himalayas. Thousands of devotees go on a pilgrimage to Amarnath year after year.



The famous twelve 'Jyotir-Linga' are also naturally made. All the twelve places are very auspicious places of pilgrimage for Shiv devotees. The twelve Jyotir-Linga are - KedarNath, VishwaNath, VaidyaNath, Shrishailam (Mallikarjun), Rameshwaram, BhimaShankar, Ghrushneshwar, Trayambakeshwar, SomaNath, Nageshwar, Omkareshwar, Mahakaleshwar.

Shiv-Linga worship rituals include ablution by water and Bili leaves while chanting prayers and "Aum Namo Shivaay" Mantra.



### DHWAJA (Pennant)



Dhwaja is the pennant mounted on top of a Hindu temple. It is usually made of white or colored cloth that flutters in the wind. The length of the cloth can be a few feet to few yards. It can have pictures of animals (like lion, tiger), birds (like Eagle, Rooster) or objects (like sun, moon). Dhawaja can represent a certain religious tradition or a certain Temple. Dhawaja also denotes the location of a Temple from far away.

**PushtiBhaktiMarg Temples (Haveli)** do not mount Dhawaja as they are considered home (Nandalaya) of NandBaba - Krishna's father and not Temples as defined by Hinduism.



The exception to this norm is ShriNathji Temple of NathDwara (India) as it represents PushtiBhaktiMarg in Hinduism. ShriNathji Temple mounts seven Dhawaja.



The only other exception is the ShriNathji Temple at Vraj (USA) that mounts Dhawaja only because it is accredited by ShriNathji Temple.



## CHAPTER - 12

### Why Do We Take 'Charanamrut' and 'Panchamrut'...?



An idol made of stone, marble, metal or wood is just an idol without any Spiritual energy. When an idol is sanctified (*Pran-Pratistha*) divine Spiritual energy is generated within it. The idol is then called The Deity (one with divine status) of a God. When such deity is worshipped more spiritual energy is generated.

Energy, once generated, never gets destroyed. It usually gets transformed into another form - as an example, electrical energy changing into sound energy (Audio output) or light energy (light bulbs). Of course, some energy gets dissipated into the environment adding to the energy already 'floating' in the atmosphere around us.

Energy is dissipated (or transferred) through fingertips (hands and feet) or head of a human body - as an example; we cover our head (and hands/feet) during winter to reduce the loss of heat.

Spiritual energy dissipates the same way. This is why the feet of a holy person or a Deity are touched by the blessing-seekers. During this process of feet-touching (*Charan-Sparsh*), a portion of holy person's or God's Spiritual energy is transferred to the person touching their feet.



**CHARANAMRUT** (Charan=Feet & Amrut=Nectar) is usually the water that has touched the pious feet of a God or a holy person/Guru. Such water acquires Spiritual quality and is considered sin-destroying and soul-purifying because of its spiritual nature.



Charanamrut is usually stored and carried in copper pots and distributed using a copper spoon. Copper is known to have healing qualities.

Charanamrut is given using a right hand and it is accepted in the palm of a right hand. Devotees drink Charanamrut, sprinkle on their head, and rub it on their eyelids and throat.

#### **Charanamrut in PushtiBhaktiMarg**



PushtiBhaktiMarg's traditional Charanamrut is prepared with two ingredients:  
(1) Sand of the village of Gokul, where Bhagwan Krishna spent His childhood  
(2) Water of the holy river Yamuna in which Bhagwan Krishna bathed and played. The sand and the water are mixed to make small dry patties (*Goti*) that can be preserved for long time.

Vaishnavs place a few specks of Charanamrut-powder on their tongue, sprinkle it on their head, and rub it on their eyelids and throat. They also add a few specks of Charanamrut-powder in each item of all their daily meals before consuming them. Charanamrut is never added to the meals offered to ShriKrishna-as-ShriNathji.



Many Vaishnavs fill their Tilak (on their forehead) with Charanamrut powder to adore the Tilak as well as to strengthen their submission to Bhagwan Krishna.

### **'Kesar-Snan' in PushtiBhaktiMarg**

PushtiBhaktiMarg has a tradition where Vaishnavs wash their Guru's feet with saffron water. This is known as 'Kesar-Snan' (Saffron-bath). Vaishnavs then treat the blessed saffron water as Charanamrut.

### **PANCHAMRUT (Five Nectar)**

Panchamrut is the ritualistic ablution (a ceremonial washing) of God's idol (Swaroop or Murti) or of a Shaligram (an oblong or round, sanctified black stone symbolizing God) using five nectars (Amrut, sweet substance) in an orderly fashion. These nectars are – Cow Milk, Curd made from cow milk, Clarified Butter (Ghee) made using cow milk, powder of unrefined rock sugar (Misri) and natural honey. Ablution ends with using cow milk and fresh water. These ingredients are first filled in a conch for pouring onto the idol during ablution. Ablution is usually accompanied with chanting of kirtans (in Vaishnav Temple) or prescribed stotras (in Hindu Temples) to create a divine ambience.

A religiously sanctified (whose "Pran-Pratistha" is performed) and regularly worshipped idol is imbued with much divine energy. Ablution passes this energy into the Panchamrut mixture making it charged with pious, spiritual energy. Taking a sip of Panchamrut cleans the inner space (soul), the mind, the intellect, and the body of a devotee.

(Note: White sugar is not used as it is decolorized (whitened) using animal-bone-charcoal.)



## CHAPTER - 13

### Why Do We respect Prasad and Maha-Prasad...?

Let us first define a few words...

#### Samagri

means the groceries - grains, spices, vegetables, fruits, etc. - that are used in preparing all the different meals for ShriKrishna-as-ShriNathji.



#### Bhog

means the various meals that are offered to ShriKrishna-as-ShriNathji during Krishna Sewa. These meals are prepared with love and devotion keeping in mind that they are being served to a child-Krishna who can consume only mildly spicy food. Meals are prepared considering various seasons as well as the time of the day.

#### Maha-Prasad / Prasad

Once ShriKrishna-as-ShriNathji accepts the Bhog, it becomes Maha-Prasad / Prasad to be distributed as Bhagwan's blessings to the devotees. Maha-Prasad usually means a complete meal that can be consumed as lunch or a dinner. Prasad usually means sweets that are given in small quantity to devotees.

#### Samadhan

When a devotee contributes an amount for Sewa in a Pushti Temple, he/she is given some Prasad as blessings. This is known as Samadhan.

A question may arise that Bhagwan really accepts and consumes the meals (Bhog) offered to Him? If He does, then why the quantity of the food remains the same?

Bhagwan Krishna answers these questions in the 13<sup>th</sup> chapter of His Bhagvad Gita. He says: "The Supreme Being does not have sense organs just like human beings but He can see, hear, smell, taste, feel anything anywhere in the universe because He is present at all places at the same time."

We all accept that the Supreme Being is omnipresent, omniscient, omnipotent, meaning He is everywhere, He knows everything, and He is the most powerful. This means anything is possible for Him, including relishing and consuming the food (as Bhog) offered to Him without reducing its quantity.



Because Prasad / Maha-Prasad is the meal (Bhog) accepted by Bhagwan, we must treat it with much love and respectfully consume it without wasting any of it. Of course, this does not mean (as some believe) that one should not warm up the cold Prasad or spice it up for one's consumption. This also does not mean that one cannot discard the spoiled Prasad.



## CHAPTER - 14

### Why Do We Observe Fasting on Ekadashi Days and Incarnation Days...?

Sanskrit word for fasting is “Upvas” which means staying near God (Up=near, Vas=stay). Fasting (Upvas) means physically and mentally detaching self from preparing or consuming regular meals by having nothing but fruit and milk. The fasting period may be a day, a week, a month and the frequency may be once a week, once a fortnight, once a month or higher. There are many benefits of regular and disciplined fasting (upvas).

#### **Spiritual Benefits**

Regular fasting is “Tapasya” (asceticism). It is a practice of self-discipline for spiritual purposes. Effective control of our senses is an integral part of spiritual pursuit.

Traditionally, a Hindu family spends considerable time preparing and consuming three meals a day as eating out is not a norm. Fasting allows the family to spend more time on religious and spiritual activities there by feeling closer to God.

#### **Medical Benefits**

Fasting can detoxicate our body that accumulates toxins from chemical fertilizers that have seeped into the food that we consume.

Fasting naturally controls our weight by using the carbohydrates stored in our body for energy.

Fasting augments the longevity of our life by slowing down the aging process.

Fasting reduces the risk of heart ailments.

#### **Economic Benefits**

Regular fasting by a vast number of people considerably reduces collective consumption of food items that effectively brings down the global hunger index in addition to reducing the cost of living for individual families.

#### **Hindu Fasting**

Traditionally, most of the Hindus observe fasting on Ekadashi day, the 11<sup>th</sup> day of the first as well as second half of a month. Since 11<sup>th</sup> day is attributed to Bhagwan Vishnu, Hindus who worship

Bhagwan Vishnu, Bhagwan Ram, Bhagwan Krishna and other Hindus observe fasting on Ekadashi days throughout the year.

In addition, Hindus observed fasting on Ganesh Chaturthi, Maha-Shivratri, Chaitri Navratri, Aaso Navratri, Durga Puja Days.

#### **PushtiBhaktiMarg Fasting**

Vaishnavs, the followers of PushtiBhaktiMarg and Bhagwan Krishna-as-ShriNathji, observe fasting on all Ekadashi days of the year. In addition, Vaishnavs observe fasting on the incarnation day of four of the 24 (including 10 major) incarnations of Bhagwan Vishnu because these four incarnations are associated with the spiritual path of devotion. These

four incarnations are of Bhagwan Ram, Bhagwan Nrusinh, Bhagwan Krishna, and Bhagwan Vaman.

For Vaishnavs, the major Ekadashi days are (1) Varuthini Ekadashi, the birthday of MahaPrabhu Shrimad Vallabhacharyaji, the founder-Guru of PushtiBhaktiMarg, (2) Pavitra Ekadashi, the birthday of PushtiBhaktiMarg, (3) Parivartini (Dan) Ekadashi when Pushti-Gurus accept gifts from Vaishnavs in their hands instead of at their feet, and (4) Prabodhini Ekadashi when Tulsi-Vivah is celebrated.

Vaishnavs do not observe fasting on any other days.

### **Misconceptions about Fasting**

Fasting means neither forcefully starving nor overeating the permissible food items. Fasting is a willing exercise of controlling and conditioning one's mind to refrain from thinking about food and one's body to consume fruits and milk just enough to maintain one's energy level for religious and spiritual activities.

Individuals who keep on stuffing themselves with variety of permissible food items destroy the main purpose of observing fasting.

### **Fasting in other religions**

All other major religions – Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Buddhism, Jainism, Sikhism – suggest fasting for spiritual upliftment.



## CHAPTER - 15

### Why Do We Need to be Vegetarian...?



Vegetarianism is one of the many norms, customs, traditions, values that have been observed culturally, socially and religiously by Hindus at large. Hinduism is a democratic religion in the sense that it practices DEI – Diversity, Equity, and

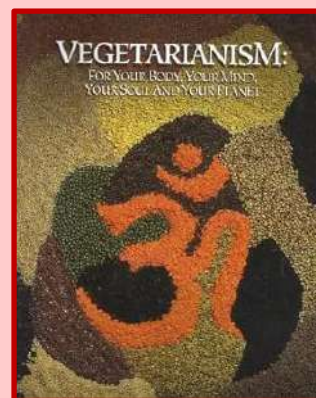
Inclusion – culture. Hindus follow a variety of religious philosophy and practices, believe in different Gods, observe seemingly opposing traditions. Owing to this essential character, most Hindus accept vegetarianism as a religious practice even though some do not.

There are many logical reasons why all human beings, including Hindus, need to be vegetarian. Let us discuss them.

(1)

There are two types of objects in the universe – Inanimate and Animate. Inanimate objects sustain their life on their own without being dependent on any other objects. While animate objects need to depend on other animate objects to sustain their life. Except the agricultural products, all other animate objects, including human beings, need to commit violence to sustain their life.

Hinduism's philosophy depicts that inanimate objects of the universe have no consciousness. While animate objects have varying degrees of consciousness. Having consciousness means being conscious of the pain being caused by any injury to self. The level of pain felt is directly proportional to the degree of consciousness.



Animate agricultural objects such as plants, vegetables, fruits, grain, cereals, etc. have the lowest degree of consciousness and so feel the least pain when injured. While animate human beings have the highest level of consciousness and so feel the maximum pain when injured. Between these two extremes, all other animate objects feel varying degrees of pain when injured.

So, when we choose to be vegetarian, we commit the least amount of violence to sustain our life. While a non-vegetarian chooses to commit higher level of violence to sustain life. Any amount of verbal, emotional, or physical violence that we commit or that is committed on our behalf, adversely affects our emotional wellbeing, our character and our spiritual progress. We can severely limit this damage by effectively controlling the violence committed by us or committed for our benefit. Being a vegetarian means practicing nonviolence.





## CHAPTER - 16

### Why Do We

### Prostate (*Dandvat-Pranaam*) and Touch-Feet (*Charan-Sparsh*) ...?

According to Hindu scriptures, there are many ways to show respect....

Pratuthaan	means	Standing up to welcome a person
Namaskaar	means	Showing reverence by joining two palms in front of the heart (also called "Vandan" or "Pranam")
Charan-Sparsh	means	Touching the feet of a person
Dandvat- Pranaam	means	Casting oneself face down on the ground in humility or submission
Pratyabhivaadan	means	Returning a greeting (Abhivaadan)

According to Hindu scriptures, a prescribed set of protocols (about who will show respect to whom) exists. The ascending order of hierarchy of respecting is ...  
Common person, Wealthy person, Person with famous family name, Elderly person, Moral person, knowledgeable person, Spiritual person, Spiritual Guru, God.

#### Dandvat Pranam (To Prostrate in front of someone)

There are two types of Dandvat Pranam.



#### Shaashtaang Dandvat-Pranam (for Male only)

"Shaashtaang" means with eight limbs of a body. It means casting us face down with the feet, knees, stomach, chest, forehead and arms (folded in front of the head) fully touching the ground in front of the God or a Guru.

#### Panchaang Dandvat-Pranam (for Female & anyone unable to offer Shaashtaang)

"Panchaang" means with five limbs of a body.

It means casting us face down with both legs bent, with both knees (or just the right knee) touching the ground and with our forehead touching the ground in front of the God or a Guru.

#### Why do we offer Dandvat Pranam?

When we offer Dandvat-Pranaam, we prostrate our body on the ground and lay flat on the ground in front of God or Guru. As our head (the uppermost part of our body) symbolizes our Ego, by offering Dandvat-Pranam we are submitting our Ego and ourselves at the feet of a God or a Guru.

This requires that we do not judge who is worth offering our Dandvat-Pranam. Our thoughts or acts of judging anyone arise out of our Ego. So, if we judge someone's eligibility for offering our Dandvat-Pranam, we are totally defeating the basic purpose of Dandvat-Pranam...!

A judgment-free Dandvat-Pranam offered with total humility and faith benefits us by helping to lower/destroy our Ego.

### Charan-Sparsh



A proper Charan-Sparsh is done by first touching the right foot, then touching the left foot and once again touching the right foot of a person with our right hand (or both hands) while bowing our head and keeping our eyesight directed at a person's feet. And then gently touching our eyes and the top of our head with the hand/s.

### Why do we do Charan-Sparsh?

Our body generates different kinds of energy. These energies get dissipated through the pointed limbs of our body like feet, hands, head. The spiritual energy flows from Guru's feet to us through our hands when we touch the feet of a Spiritual Guru with our hands. Such a transfer is a blessing for us, people with much less spiritual energy.

As explained before, a judgment-free Charan-Sparsh done with total humility and faith surely benefits us spiritually and it gradually lowers our Ego.

### Why do we offer money/gift only at the feet of a Guru?

A Spiritual Guru teaches us the ways to be spiritual and guides us on our chosen spiritual path. He replies to our questions (even the silly ones!) and removes any doubts that we may have. He enlightens us with spiritual knowledge. As such, he leads us to our Bhagwan. Of course, we feel obliged to him for all that he is doing for us. Offering money or gifts to our Guru is a way to express love, respect and gratitude that we feel for our Guru.

When we give someone money or gifts, our hands are above the hands of the receiver. Such gestures of giving tend to boost our ego as we feel that we are obliging the receiver.

Thus, giving money/gift to our Guru in their hands surely boosts our ego. This gesture defeats the basic purpose of being spiritual that requires lowering/destroying our ego.

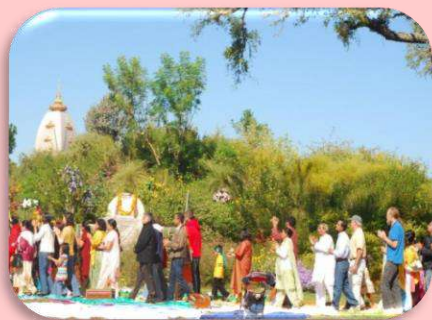
We can avoid boosting our ego by offering (not giving) money/gift at our Guru's feet since we need to bow down to Guru to make an offering in such a manner.

Such bodily gesture of offering lowers our ego – helping our efforts to be spiritual.



## CHAPTER - 17

### Why Do We Do Circumambulation (*Pradakshina* or *Parikrama*) ...?



It is customary for Hindus to circumambulate ("Pradakshina") around the Sanctum Sanctorum ("Garbh-Gruh", "Nij-Mandir") where the Deity resides, holy trees like Peepal, Banyan, Shami, holy plants like Tulsi, and sacred fire of altar.

It is also customary to go around ("Parikrama") a large area having several places of pilgrimage. Going around Vraj province of India or the Govardhan hill are examples

of Parikrama.

Even though both 'Pradakshina' and 'Parikrama' means going around, 'Pradakshina' requires that we keep the object (Deity, Temple, ...) of 'Pradakshina' on our right side. There is no such norm for 'Parikrama'.

#### Why do we do Pradakshina?

When we go around the deity of Bhagwan Krishna, we make a statement that Krishna is the focal point of our lives. We make a commitment to keep Krishna at the center of all the activities that we do in our personal and professional lives. We make a promise to ourselves to always keep Krishna in our mind and heart.

#### Why a Pradakshina is done only in a clockwise direction?

Surely, not to avoid a two-way traffic jam...!!

Right is always RIGHT. Hinduism considers the right side as an auspicious one. When we do Pradakshina in a clockwise manner, we keep the Deity on our right.

Bhagwan Krishna is our indispensable source of grace, love, strength, Dharm, moral and ethics. When we keep Him on our right side, we tend to live our lives in a righteous manner and overcome any immoral thoughts and deeds as well as difficulties and obstacles.

#### What must we do while doing Pradakshina?

We must silently chant Krishna's name ("ShriKrishnah Sharanam Mama") and/or remember His many Leelas (Krishna's divine playful acts in Vraj of India). What we must NOT do is to talk/chat/have a laugh with fellow Vaishnavs!

#### What other kinds of Pradakshina can one do?

- ❖ Hinduism teaches us to consider our parents and Guru as living Gods. This is obvious from the verse... "MatruDevo bhava, PitruDevo bhava, AcharyaDevo bhava". Whenever we get an opportunity, we must do Pradakshina of our parents and Guru with respect for and faith in them.
- ❖ Hinduism teaches us that God resides in all beings.

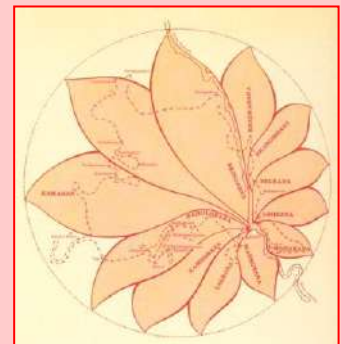
Some Hindus, after a traditional Pooja, do self-Pradakshina. This is done by standing in one place with clasped hands and turning around on our feet while silently chanting Krishna's name.

## Vraj Parikrama

Millions of Krishna devotees including PushtiBhaktiMarg Vaishnavs do Parikrama of the Land of Krishna (Vraj-Bhoomi, Vraj province) to remember Krishna-Leelas by visiting the very places where Krishna performed those Leelas during his childhood.

This pilgrimage is popularly known as “Vraj Parikrama”. Vaishnavs also calls it “Leelee Parikrama” as it is traditionally done after the wet ('Leelee') season of monsoon and when the grounds are green ('Leelee') with fresh grass and trees after the monsoon season.

Vraj-Parikrama begins and ends in the ancient City of Mathura. It traverses about 160 miles in 45 days and culminates just before Diwali. Year after year, the Vraj-Parikrama is led by a descendent of ShriMahaPrabhuji in which thousands of Vaishnavs from all over the world participate. For 45 days the Vaishnav pilgrims live in tents and most of them travel the distance barefooted. At the end of the Vraj-Parikrama, Vaishnavs take the dip in the holy waters of Yamunaji with faith and reverence on the day of 'Bhai-Bij'. Since, Yamunaji is the sister of Yamraj (Lord of Death), Vaishnavs believe that the dip on the day (Bhai-Bij) celebrating brother-sister relationship, will relieve them from the fears of death.



Vaishnavs do Vraj-Parikrama to remember their beloved Krishna and His Leelas and NOT to wash away their sins or earn 'Punya'. Vraj-Parikrama experience spiritually uplifts Vaishnavs and strengthens their love for Krishna.

The name ‘Vraj’ has many meanings. Some of them are –

- To Go symbolizing the pilgrimage of Vraj by Vaishnavs
- To Approach symbolizing devotees approaching ShriKrishna in Vraj
- To Progress symbolizing Spiritual-Devotional progress of Vaishnavs

‘Vraj’ has three different forms...

- Physical Form the land that is Bhagwan Krishna’s childhood playground
- Spiritual Form the power that devotionally inspires the devotees
- Divine Form manifestation of Bhagwan Krishna

We can experience the Spiritual as well Divine form of Vraj when we take a pilgrimage to Vraj with absolute faith and total dedication.

Vraj is the pious place where...

- Krishna spent his childhood years

- Krishna performed many Leelas (Playful divine acts)
- Krishna taught Vrajvaasis (residents of Vraj) how to love selflessly
- Krishna loved Vrajvaasis in response to their love for him
- Krishna played six-month long Raas-Leela with his beloved Gopis
- Krishna still dwells in the trees, plants, hills, ponds, river, sand, space, air, ...
- Vaishnavs can experience Krishna's love, even today, if they learn to love selflessly and dedicate themselves to Krishna

Vraj-Parikrama starts from Mathura follows the inner path by going towards Madhuvan and returns to Mathura after about 40-45 days.

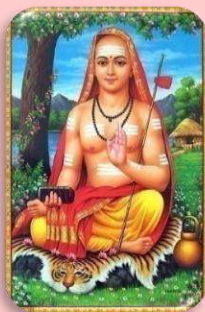




## CHAPTER - 18

### Why Do We Worship Guru Shrimad Vallabhacharyaji (ShriMahaPrabhuji)...?

For the Hindus, including Vaishnavs, a Spiritual Guru is revered second only to The God.



Hinduism's foremost Philosopher-Acharya Shri Adi Shankaracharya has stated: "In the world, there always exist some pure souls who have attained Self-realization. They bring blessings to all humanity, like the coming of spring. These men and women have already overcome the cycle of birth-death-rebirth but they remain among us to help others overcome the same cycle. Such individuals are worthy to be Spiritual Guru of others."

For a Spiritual Seeker - a disciple - The Guru is...

- ...an Inspirer, a Motivator, a Facilitator, a Guide, a well-wishing Friend
- ...the Mentor, the gateway to God, the Salvation itself

Guru is the one who cleans a Seeker's heart, mind and intellect of...

- ...any misconceptions about spirituality and the Spiritual Paths
- ...any ignorance about God (Parmatma) and the Self (Atma)
- ...any ego-centric thoughts/feelings
- ...any vices

Guru is the one who fills a disciple's heart, mind and intellect with true knowledge of Parmatma, Atma, the divine relationship between the two and the method to realize the divine relationship.

Hinduism preaches that a Seeker does not attain liberation ('Moksh') without the hand-holding guidance from a Guru who is well versed in scriptures, who has conquered ego and possessiveness and who himself has attained Self-Realization.

A Teacher or a Professor imparts information to help us achieve our goal of getting an educational degree that would help us in our professional life.

A Spiritual Guru does not play the role of an information giver, a teacher in our life. A Guru's goal is to awaken us to our identity as a part of The Supreme Soul - Bhagwan Krishna. A Guru's mission is to cleanse us of any emotional/intellectual impurities and prepare us for achieving the highest level of consciousness.

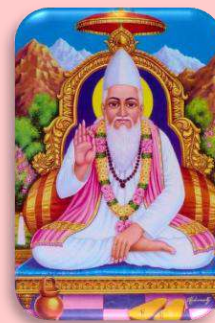
That is the difference between a Guru and a Teacher/Professor.

A Spiritual Guru is like GPS (Global Positioning System) - the navigation system that guides the drivers to their destination in unknown territory, correcting them when they err in following instructions...! The ones who venture on an unfamiliar Spiritual path needs handholding by a capable and unselfish Guru who would guide them appropriately without exploiting their faith and let go of them when it is time for them to continue their Spiritual journey on their own. Such a Spiritual Guru is called 'SadGuru' - A True Guru.

Offering a tribute to his SadGuru, Sant Kabir says...

**Guru Govind dono khade, kaake laagu paay  
Balihari Guru aapki, Govind diyo bataay**

Sant Kabir says: "In the presence of my Guru and The God, I am confused about whom to bow down first! But I know that only because of my Guru I am blessed with an opportunity to meet The God and the Guru together. So, I bow down to both of you."



Scriptures depict many verses in the praise of a Guru...one of the popular ones is...

**Gurur Brahma, Gurur Vishnu, Gurur Devo Maheshwara  
Gurur saakshaat Param Brahm, Tasmai Shri Gurave Namah**

Guru is Brahma-like           (Guru causes an enlightened rebirth of a disciple)  
Guru is Vishnu-like           (Guru preserves/enhances virtues of a disciple)  
Guru is Mahesh-Like         (Guru destroys the vices of a disciple)  
Guru is ParBrahm-like       (Guru creates a new spiritual universe for a disciple)  
I bow down to such a Guru.

Scriptures say this about the relationship between a Guru and a disciple...

**Sah Na Vavastu, Sah Nau Bhu-Naktu, Sah Viryam Karvaa-Vahai  
Tejasvi Na Vadhit-Mastu, Maa Vid-Visha-Vahai  
Aum Shanti-Hee, Shanti-Hee, Shanti-Hee**

May the God (Bhagwan) protect both of us (Guru and disciple).  
May He nourish both of us. May our learning be brilliant.  
May we not compete. May we have no bad feelings towards each other.  
Let there be Peace all around.

Different kinds of Guru traditions exist in Hinduism.

Disciple Convention ('Shishya Parampara'):

The Hinduism traditions (Sampraday) in which the Gurus observe celibacy (remains unmarried), the presiding Guru selects the most qualified disciple to be the next Guru. Examples: ShriShankaracharya Sampraday, Some sub-traditions (BAPS, Gadhada, ..) of SwamiNarayan Sampraday

Descendent Convention ('Vansh Parampara'):

The Hinduism traditions (Sampraday) in which the Gurus marry and have a family, the presiding Guru's eldest descendent becomes the next Guru. Examples: Pushti-Bhakti-Sampraday, Two sub-traditions (Nar-Narayan Gadi of Amdavad, Laxmi-Narayan Gadi of Vadtal) of SwamNarayan Sampraday

Self-Guru Convention ('Atma-Guru'):

Hinduism also accepts a convention by which one does not need another person as a Guru, and one is one's own Guru in the Spiritual Path of one's choice.

## Shrimad Vallabhacharyaji - The Guru of PushtiBhaktiMarg

The founder-Guru of PushtiBhaktiMarg, MahaPrabhu Shrimad Vallabhacharyaji describes the characteristics of PushtiBhaktiMarg Guru in his book 'Sarv-Niryana-Prakaran'.



**Krushna-Sewa Param-Vikshay  
Dambh-Aadi-Rahitam Naram  
ShriBhagwat-Tatva-Gyam  
Bhaje-Jigyaasu-raadaraat**

A PushtiBhaktiMarg Guru is the one who is constantly immersed in KrishnaSewa, who is devoid of Ego and the Ego-related vices, who is well-versed in Shrimad Bhagwat (a scripture of Krishna devotion) and whose main pursuit ('Purusharth') is Love-Devotion Krishna.

ShriVallabh also instructs that a person must carefully analyze and examine the qualities of a Guru before accepting him/her as a Guru.

ShriVallabh goes even further to make a clear statement that he is establishing himself as the one and only Guru of PushtiBhaktiMarg as he does not see the possibility of another person ever having the characteristics of a Guru as he had defined.

Thus, ShriVallabh (ShriMahaPrabhuji) is the one and the only Guru of PushtiBhaktiMarg. He is the only one who can lead us to Bhagwan ShriKrishna-as-ShriNathji.

His descendants are known as 'Guru-Dwar' - A Gateway to Guru ShriVallabh.

An event in the life of ShriVallabh demonstrates what happens to a greedy, fallen Guru...

Once when ShriVallabh was travelling with his disciples, they all saw a python being eaten away by thousands of ants. Seeing this pitiable condition of the python, the disciples asked about it to ShriVallabh.

He explained that in previous life the python was a Guru who collected money from his many disciples and used the wealth for his selfish purposes instead of spending it for the spiritual benefits of his disciples or the community.

So, to suffer the consequences of his Karma (action), he was born as a python to be eaten away by his disciples in the form of ants.

The story may be factual or implanted to convey an important teaching. The moral of the story is that if a Guru cheats his/her disciples or exploits their faith then most certainly the Guru faces the consequences of such Karma in his current or later life.

An important learning for all Vaishnavs from this story is.... We must never let our Guru cheat or exploit us in any way -- for our own good as well as for Guru's benefit.



## CHAPTER - 19

### Why Do We Worship-Serve-Love ShriKrishna-as-ShriNathji ...?

ShriNathji is a seven-year young Krishna.  
He is another form of Krishna.  
He is Krishna with a different name.  
As such, they both are same –  
Krishna is ShriNathji and ShriNathji is Krishna.  
We will be mostly using Krishna for our discussion.

In PushtiBhaktiMarg, we, the Vaishnavs, worship/serve/love ShriKrishna-as-ShriNathji for two main reasons.

(1)

PushtiBhaktiMarg is...

...The Path to offer love-devotion to ShriKrishna-as-ShriNathji

...The Path to experience Krishna's Love

...The Path where Krishna encourages His devotees in their journey towards Him

PushtiBhaktiMarg offers a way to fall in love with ShriKrishna.

And Krishna is the ONLY God whom we can love in many ways...

We can love Him as our Master

We can love Him as our Friend

We can love Him as our Child

We can love Him as our Boyfriend/Lover/Husband

As such, Krishna decides what kind of love-relationship He wants us to have with Him. Krishna can choose to be a child to some of us, a friend to some of us, a boyfriend/Lover to some of us. But He is the Master to all of us.

We must begin loving Krishna by accepting Him as our Master and declaring ourselves as His subjects. This is known as Humility (Humbleness). He likes His devotees to be humble.

(2)

Followers of Hinduism worship one or more Gods and Goddesses. Many Hindus (and all Non-Hindus) believe that many Gods/Goddesses do exist as per Hinduism philosophy and scriptures. Some even believe that there are 330 Million Gods/Goddesses looking over us from the heavens...! .... Nothing can be far from the truth...!

Based on Vedas, Upanishads and Bhagvad Gita, there is only ONE God who is perceived in different ways by the Sages and the seers. Based on their perception and their relationship with the ONE God, they had evolved different forms and names for the same ONE God. That is why it is falsely believed that Hinduism has many Gods/Goddesses





The scriptures and specifically Bhagvad Gita establish that Bhagwan Krishna is the ONE God, Supreme God - ParBrahm, Parmatma. Bhagwan Krishna is the ONLY God who claims that He is the Supreme God, in His Bhagvad Gita.

Krishna claims that everything that we see (or do not see) around us -- our family, our relatives, our friends, the people, Gods, Goddesses, the objects - the mountain, the river, the trees, the birds, the animals -- have come ONLY from Him. They are nothing but different forms of Him only. He is the source of everything in this universe.

So, if Bhagwan Krishna is the Supreme God, why not worship/serve Him...?

Why worship any other Gods/Goddesses that are nothing but mere manifestations of Parbrahm Bhagwan Krishna...?

These are the two main reasons why ShriMahaPrabhuji instructed his Vaishnavs to worship/serve/love Bhagwan Krishna and only Bhagwan Krishna.

### **Why do Vaishnavs worship/serve/love child Krishna and not adult Krishna?**

Bhagwan Krishna appeared on earth for many reasons. His purposeful life on earth had many purposes. Some of them were...

- 1) To teach Vrajvaasis (and so the entire world) to selflessly love Him
- 2) To experience selfless love of Vrajvaasis
- 3) To grant Vrajvaasis a divine experience of His love
- 4) To fight and destroy evil
- 5) To establish Dharm - Rule of Righteousness
- 6) To give an everlasting message (Bhagvad Gita) to the world



The first three purposes relate to PushtiBhaktiMarg - the Path of Love-Devotion. Krishna fulfilled these purposes as child Krishna, living in Vraj until He was eleven years and 52 days old.

This is the reason ShriMahaPrabhuji had advised Vaishnavs to worship/serve/love only child Krishna.

Of course, this does not mean that Vaishnavs should disregard/disrespect adult Krishna...!

Can there be any difference between child Krishna and adult Krishna...? Of course, not.

### **Why is Bhagwan Krishna's body color blue-black?**

Bhagwan Krishna being ParBrahm, Parmatma is omnipresent.

He is present everywhere. He is all around us,

He is inside of us - just like space. And the space is blue-black.

So, the color of Krishna is imagined to be blue-black.



## CHAPTER - 20

### Why Do We Worship ShriYamunaji as Our Mother-Goddess ...?

ShriYamunaji is...

- ❖ A form of Bhagwan Krishna
- ❖ The consort (wife) of Bhagwan Krishna
- ❖ The manifestation of Krishna's Power-of-Grace ('Krupa')
- ❖ The daughter of 'SuryaDev', the Sun God
- ❖ The sister of 'Yamraj', the God of Death

In addition,

- Bhagwan Krishna has granted Yamunaji His Power-of-Grace and given her responsibility to help His devotees in their journey towards Him and bring them to Him to experience His love.
- Yamunaji helps all the Vaishnavs who worships her with love, respect and faith.
- Yamunaji destroys her devotee Vaishnav's fear of death.
- A Vaishnav's troubles disappear and all the desires of a Vaishnav are fulfilled when a Vaishnav worships Yamunaji by reciting Yamunashtak prayer at least once a day with love, respect and faith.



These are the reasons why we, the Vaishnavs, have Yamunaji as our Mother-Goddess.

There are three different forms of Yamunaji.

#### Yamunaji – The Physical Form

Yamunaji's physical form is The River Yamunaji.

The river Yamuna originates from a mountain known as "Kalind" in the Himalaya Mountain region of northern India. Yamunaji is also known as "Kaalindi" – the daughter of Kalind Mountain. Yamunaji flows through 'Vraj' -- a province in northern India where Bhagwan Krishna spent His childhood years.

Vaishnavs take a holy bath in the river Yamuna and drinks her water to purify themselves.

#### Yamunaji – The Spiritual Form

Bhagwan Krishna has vested His divine power of "Grace" into Yamunaji so she can help and guide the Vaishnavs on the Path of Love-Devotion for ShriKrishna.

This Power-of-Grace is Yamunaji's Spiritual form.

#### Yamunaji – The Divine Form

Yamunaji is the fourth consort of Bhagwan Krishna. This is her Divine Form.





ShriMahaPrabhuji wrote a prayer “Yamunashtak” in the praise of ShriYamunaji. It is the most popular prayer in PushtiBhaktiMarg.

ShriVallabh has promised that reciting Yamunashtak with utmost faith, respect and love for Yamunaji and Krishna shall benefit Vaishnavs as ...

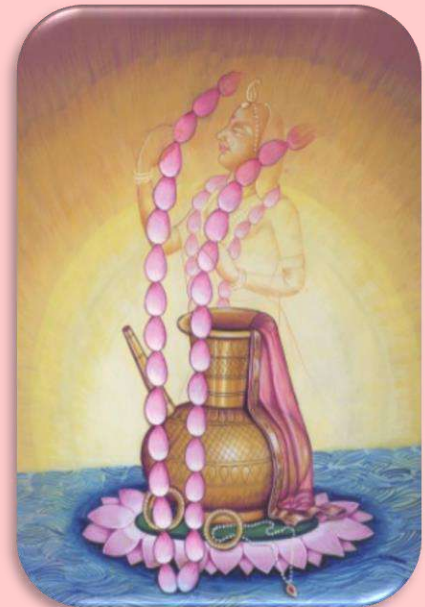
- ❖ Destruction of all mortal sins
- ❖ Intensification of love for Bhagwan Krishna
- ❖ Reward of eight devotional achievements
- ❖ Pleasure of Bhagwan Krishna
- ❖ Victory of core nature of love and peace

Yamunashtak explains the eight divine powers of Yamunaji ...

- ❖ To award eight devotional achievements to a Vaishnav
- ❖ To intensify Vaishnav's love for ShriKrishna
- ❖ To remove obstacles on the Path to ShriKrishna
- ❖ To strengthen Vaishnav's relation with ShriKrishna
- ❖ To expedite Vaishnav's unconditional surrender to ShriKrishna
- ❖ To raise Vaishnav's suitability to experience ShriKrishna's Grace
- ❖ To transform Vaishnav's body-and-mind
- ❖ To confer the pleasure of ShriKrishna's touch to a Vaishnav

Yamunashtak explains the eight devotional achievements that Yamunaji grants to Vaishnavs...

- ❖ Purification of body and mind to serve and experience Bhagwan Krishna
- ❖ Experiencing, through physical eyes/ears, Krishna’s Leelas
- ❖ Participating in Krishna’s Leelas
- ❖ Attaining the knowledge that every person/object is a form of Krishna
- ❖ Saturating the mind, intellect and consciousness only with Krishna
- ❖ Experiencing Krishna’s Leelas only through the consciousness
- ❖ Feeling Krishna’s all-encompassing love even during His physical absence
- ❖ Experiencing Krishna everywhere, all the time



## CHAPTER - 21

### Why Do We

### Need to be Initiated With Sharan-Mantra & BrahmSambandh-Mantra...?

#### Religious Initiation (Dharm-Diksha)

Every religion and religious tradition (Sampraday) have a process to invite, include, and initiate willing individuals into their system of religious philosophy and practice. Hinduism and its various traditions use specific Mantra and predetermined process to administer it to initiate individuals. All initiation Mantras have some norms associated with them, such as, when, where, and how Mantra can be used to initiate by whom or can be recited by whom.

As a devotional tradition of Hinduism, PushtiBhaktiMarg has two step initiation process. First step is known as “Sharan-Mantra Initiation”, and the second step is known as “Brahm-Sambandh-Mantra Initiation”.

#### Sharan-Mantra Initiation

“Sharan” means unconditional surrender to Bhagwan Krishna. By accepting this initiation an individual unconditionally surrenders self at the pious feet of Bhagwan Krishna and becomes a Vaishnav.



As descendent of PushtiBhaktiMarg’s founder-Guru MahaPrabhu Shrimad VallabhaCharyaji, a Pushti-Guru recites “**ShriKrushnah Sharanam Mam**” Mantra three times in the right ear of the willing individual of any age and blesses the person with a necklace (Kanthi) of Tulsi beads to make the person a Vaishnav in the tradition of PushtiBhaktiMarg. This Mantra is known as Sharan-Mantra or Akshtakshar-Mantra. Vaishnav is then advised to recite this Mantra as much as possible.

There are no norms associated with Ashtakshar-Mantra. It can be recited anywhere, anytime by anyone.

#### Brahm-Sambandh-Mantra (Nivedan-Mantra) Initiation

By accepting this initiation Vaishnav commits to totally submit self along with all possessions at the pious feet of Bhagwan Krishna.

“Brahm-Sambandh” means re-establishing relationship with Bhagwan Krishna who is the Supreme Being (ParBrahm). ShriMahaPrabhuji’s philosophy dictates that our individual soul is a part of ParBrahm Krishna and originated from Him, the Supreme Soul (Parmatma). It also dictates that our soul has forgotten his identity and his relationship with ParBrahm Krishna, and it is our duty to have our soul remember his identity by re-establishing and realizing our relationship with Parmatma Krishna.



At midnight of the eleventh day (Ekadashi) of the first half of the month of Shravan of the Hindu year Vikram Samvat 1549 (1493 CE), ShriKrishna-as-ShriNathji Himself gave this divine Brahm-Sambandh-Mantra to ShriMahaPrabhuji to reestablish individuals' relationship with Him by initiating them as Vaishnavs into PushtiBhaktiMarg.

### **Brahm-Sambandh-Mantra**

This Mantra must be recited three times in front of ShriKrishna-as-ShriNathji in the sanctity of one's home after having a shower and changing into clean, fresh clothes. The Meaning of the Mantra can be recited anytime, anywhere.

### **The Mantra (Sanskrit)**

सहस्र परिवत्सर मित काल जात कृष्ण-वियोग-जनित ताप-क्लेश आनंद तीरोभावोहम्

भगवते कृष्णाय श्रीगोपीजन-वल्लभाय

देह इंद्रिय प्राण अंतःकरणानि तद् धर्मान् च दार आगार पुत्र आप्त वित्त

इह पराणि आत्मना सह समर्पयामि

दासोहम्

कृष्ण तवास्मि कृष्ण तवास्मि कृष्ण तवास्मि

### **The Mantra (Transliteration)**

Sahasra Parivatsar Mit Kaal Jaat Krushna-Viyog-Janit Taap-Klesh Aanand Tirobhavoham  
Bhagvate Krushnaay ShriGopijan-Vallabhay

Deh Indriya Praan Antah-Karanaani Tad Dharman ch Daar Aagaar Putra Aapt Vitta  
Iha Paraani Aatmana Sah Samarpayaami

Daasoham

Krushna Tavasmi Krushna Tavasmi Krushna Tavasmi

### **The Mantra (Meaning)**

It has been ages since I separated from ParBrahm Krishna, but I do not experience either the bliss of being with Him or anguish of separation from Him. Such as I am, to be with Him once again, I willingly dedicate to Bhagwan Krishna, my body, my senses, my lifeforce, my mind-intellect-ego-consciousness and their attributes, my spouse, my children, my relatives and friends, my home, my wealth, my soul and everything else that I call mine in this world and the world beyond.

I remain nothing but Bhagwan Krishna's subject.

I am yours forever, Krishna. I am yours forever, Krishna.

I am yours forever, Krishna.





## Receiving Brahm-Sambandh-Mantra Initiation

Brahm-Sambandh-Mantra was entrusted to ShriMahaPrabhuji. So, only he was to administer this Mantra to initiate Vaishnavs. He ordained that in his physical absence, his descendants, commonly known as “GuruDwar” (Pushti-Guru), will initiate Vaishnavs with this Mantra only on his behalf and not on their own.

Thus, willing Vaishnavs can be initiated with this Mantra only and only by the descendants of ShriMahaPrabhuji following certain norms as follows.

### Before Initiation...

- ❖ Vaishnavs must very consciously decide to receive this initiation after thoroughly understanding the Vaishnav values and code of conduct associated with it.
- ❖ Vaishnavs must carefully select a Pushti-Guru (Guru-Dwar) through whom to receive it.
- ❖ Vaishnavs must convey their willingness to the Pushti-Guru who may or may not accept their request.
- ❖ Vaishnavs must observe strict fasting (consume only milk, fruits, water) the day before initiation.
- ❖ Vaishnavs must shampoo hair, take shower, wear clean/fresh clothes, not eat/drink anything, bring an offering (usually money) for ShriThakorji and Pushti-Guru, arrive on time on the day of initiation.
- ❖ Vaishnavs must follow all instructions given by Pushti-Guru and humbly ask questions, if any.

### During Initiation...

Pushti-Guru will ask Vaishnavs to stand in front of Shriji Swaroop at Guru’s home or in a Pushti Temple during Shringar darshan. Pushti-Guru will then ask Vaishnavs to place their right-hand palm on top of their left-hand palm and then place a Tulsi leaf-pair (Tulsi-Dal) on their right-hand palm. Pushti-Guru will then recite Brahm-Sambandh-Mantra three times and ask Vaishnavs to repeat the same. Pushti-Guru will then bless Vaishnavs with a necklace (Kanthi) of Tulsi beads. At last, Pushti-Guru directs Vaishnavs to offer the Tulsi-Dal from their palm at the feet of Shriji Swaroop.

### After Initiation...

- ❖ Vaishnavs must attentively listen to the duties of initiated Vaishnavs as explained by Pushti-Guru.
- ❖ Vaishnavs must make an offering (Bhet) at the feet of ShriThakorji as well as at the feet of Pushti-Guru after the initiation.
- ❖ Vaishnavs must remember this initiation day as their second birthday because they are born again as Vaishnavs. Vaishnavs must celebrate their Brahm-Sambandh-Mantra initiation day every year.
- ❖ Vaishnavs must make an offering, per their ability, at each instance of their meeting with the Pushti-Guru who initiated them on behalf of MahaPrabhu Shrimad VallabhaCharyaji.

## Some FAQs...

### **What is the purpose of being initiated as Vaishnavs...?**

These two initiations grant Vaishnavs divine right to dutifully follow PushtiBhaktiMarg – Path of Love-Devotion for Bhagwan ShriKrishna-as-ShriNathji – as ordained by ShriMahaPrabhuji and perform KrishnaSewa per Pushti tradition.

### **Does one need to be initiated as Pushti-Vaishnav to offer love-devotion to Bhagwan Krishna...?**

NO. The well-known Krishna-devotees Mirabai and Narsinh Mehta were never initiated as Pushti-Vaishnavs. But they offered their selfless love-devotion to Krishna and Krishna willingly and happily accepted their selfless love. Pushti initiation is necessary only if one wishes to follow the Pushti way of love-devotion to Bhagwan Krishna.

### **What is the meaning of wearing two Tulsi-Kanthi...?**

The two Tulsi-Kanthi symbolize Vaishnav's willful unconditional surrender (Sharanagati) and absolute dedication (Samarpan) to ShriKrishna-as-ShriNathji.

### **Is it advisable to wear Tulsi-Kanthi/s made with Tulsi beads along with gold/silver beads and gold/silver thread...?**

Tulsi-Kanthi has a devotional/spiritual value and purpose associated with it. Tulsi-Kanthi is not an ornament and must not be treated like one. Some argue that the cotton thread of the Kanthi breaks easily and so replace with gold/silver thread. This argument has no value as a plastic thread can easily be used in place of cotton thread. Of course, cotton thread is the most desirable even if it breaks easily.

### **Do Vaishnavs have to wear Tulsi-Kanthi around their neck all the time...?**

It is desirable to wear one or two Tulsi-Kanthi around the neck all the time. But, in a situation when one cannot do it, one can keep the Tulsi-Kanthi in a purse, wallet or pocket to carry it along.

### **How to dispose of damaged Tulsi-Kanthi...?**

One can dispose of damaged Tulsi-Kanthi or loose Tulsi beads in the pot of Tulsi or any other plants or in a river or in a lake.

### **What to do with Vaishnav's Tulsi-Kanthi when he/she dies...?**

Tulsi-Kanthi/s can continue to be in the neck of the dead body of a Vaishnav until the time when the last rite (burning of the dead body) is to be performed. Just before the last rite, Tulsi-Kanthi/s can be taken off the neck and placed on the chest of the dead body to burn them along with the body.

### **Why Tulsi-Kanthi needs to be replaced after visiting cremation ground for someone's funeral...?**

Cremation ground is considered inauspicious. Closeness to a dead body is also considered inauspicious. So, visiting a cremation ground for someone's last rite makes one

inauspicious. That is why shower, and a change of clothes is ordained after such a visit. Tulsi beads are permanently auspicious, but the cotton thread can become inauspicious. So, instead of “washing” the Tulsi-Kanathi, it is replaced. As such, no one replaces or even cleans a Tulsi-Kanathi made with Tulsi beads as well as gold/silver beads and thread...!





## CHAPTER - 22

### Why Do We Need ShriKrishna-as-ShriNathji's Swaroop for Sewa ...?

Note: Swaroop / Chitra (Painting, picture) / Murti & Sewa/Pooja in case of God/Guru worship -- these are the different words that can be collectively (but poorly...!) described as Idol Worship. We will use all these words appropriately.



Three major religions - Judaism, Christianity, Islam - do not believe in idol worship. Their reasoning is... when God is infinite/unlimited and unseen how He can be 'limited' and 'seen' in form of an idol? They are right in their reasoning based on their religious philosophy. But their dislike or hatred for the idol-worshipping religions and the followers is utterly disgraceful. They do not need to destroy idols worshipped by others.

As such, if we look at them from idol-worshipper's eyes --- Judaism idolizes its holy scriptures called 'Torah' (just like 'Granth-Sahib' of Sikh religion) or the Wailing Wall of Jerusalem. Christianity worships and kneels before the icon of Christ-on-cross. Islam accepts the building of 'Kaaba' as an idol to worship and offer their 'Namaz' only in the direction of 'Kaaba'. --- What is this if not idol/icon/image worshipping...?!!

Many (including the rationalist Hindus) argue that God is omnipresent and so He is everywhere - so why worship Him in the form of an idol?

Their argument is right BUT do they 'see' and 'feel' God into all the different objects - living as well as non-living - of the world...? If they do, then they are right about what they say BUT if they do not, then they have no right to argue against idol-worship.



Hinduism offers four major paths of Spirituality --  
(1) Path of Action, (2) Path of Meditation,  
(3) Path of Knowledge and (4) Path of Devotion.

Path of Action involves performing selfless deeds without attaching ourselves - our ego - with them. These selfless deeds are associated with the personal and professional life of an individual. There is no need to worship an idol.

Path of Meditation involves practicing meditation while concentrating on anything -- a person, an object or just plain simple 'light'. There is no specific need for worshipping an idol.

Path of Knowledge involves reading-thinking-contemplating-learning scriptures to realize The Truth. It does not involve any worshipping of idol.

Now let us talk about the Path of Devotion that surely involves worshipping.

In Hinduism, God is described in variety of ways...

- God is Nirakar (Form-Free) as well as Sakar (Form-Bound)
- God is Nirgun (Attribute-Free) as well as Sagun (Attribute-Bound)
- God is Unseen who can make Himself visible
- God is Infinite who can take any finite shape

Based on these varied descriptions of God, two main types of devotional practices have evolved.

### "Nirakar-Nirgun" Devotion



Devotees worship the Form-Free and Attribute-Free God who is present but cannot be seen. They do not need to use any image-icon-idol-deity to help them offer their devotion to God and concentrate on their worship. They draw their mind inwards to concentrate and worship their God. At the most, they consider a source of bright light as a symbol of God. This type of devotion can be practiced either at home or in a monastery (Ashram). No Temple

with an idol is necessary for such devotion.

### "Sakar-Sagun" Devotion

Devotees worship Form-Bound, Attribute-Bound God. They do need an image/icon/idol (Murti/Swaroop) to help them offer their devotion to God and concentrate on their worship. They draw their minds outwards towards the idol of the God as part of their worship.



This type of devotion can be practiced at home or in a temple.

The way we are, it is difficult for us to offer our love and respect to an abstract form that we cannot see or feel. Thus, Nirakar-Nirgun devotion (worshipping without an idol) is difficult in the sense that we cannot easily concentrate in our worshipping rituals and cannot easily bring ourselves to offer our respect and love to God.

Sakar-Sagun devotion is easy to practice since it is easy for us to concentrate on the idol that we can see, touch and offer our love and respect to.

**As for PushtiBhaktiMarg,** it is a path of offering love-filled devotion to Krishna. So, Vaishnavs need Krishna's Swaroop to practice offering their love even though Krishna resides in every being including Vaishnavs.

### **What is "Pran-Pratishtha" and "Purushottam-Aavirbhav" ?**

An idol is sanctified by qualified Brahmin/Priest/Guru by reciting specific Stotras (as ordained by the scriptures) before worshipping can commence in Temples.

This act is known as 'Pran-Pratishtha' -- invoking God into the idol, inviting God's divinity into the idol. After this act, the idol does not remain a simple statute of stone, metal or wood. The idol becomes a divine idol who can then be called 'Murti' and can formally be worshipped in a Temple.

**In PushtiBhaktiMarg**, such an act is known as 'Purushottam Aavirbhav' -- meaning, inviting Krishna into the idol. The ritual is performed by a qualified Brahmin in presence of a Pushti Guru. After the ritual, the idol becomes a living God who can then be called 'Swaroop' and can be worshipped, served, and loved by Vaishnavs. This ritual is performed for the Swaroop in a Vaishnav Temple. As for home-based Krishna-Sewa, an ritual known as 'Pushtavava' is done for the idol by a Pushti-Guru. After the ritual, the Swaroop can be served with love and respect by a Vaishnav at home.

### **Can Vaishnavs do Krishna-Sewa at home without “Pushtavava” ?**

Of course, Vaishnavs can do that. Krishna needs His devotee's selfless love. Such love has one and only one rule and rule is nothing but selfless love...!

If one wishes to follow PushtiBhaktiMarg methodology of Krishna-Sewa then only “Pushtavava” becomes necessary otherwise not.

### **What is the difference between 'Murti' and 'Swaroop'?**

'Murti' represents God's divinity while 'Swaroop' is a living God.

'Swaroop' (Swa=one's own self, Roop=form) means God's own form - Krishna's own form - Krishna Himself.

One can perform 'Pooja' of a Murti, and one performs 'Sewa' of a Swaroop.

Thus, PushtiBhaktiMarg normally uses the word 'Swaroop'. Most of the other devotional paths use the word 'Murti'.





## CHAPTER - 23

### Why Do We Perform Krishna-Sewa (ShriNathji-Sewa) ...?

'Sewa' means serving someone without expecting anything in return. Krishna-Sewa means serving ShriKrishna-as-ShriNathji.

For Vaishnavs, Krishna is their Master and Vaishnavs are His subjects. Subjects are supposed to serve their Master and so, Vaishnavs serve Krishna.

Krishna is a Living Personal God for Vaishnavs - just like any other living person in Vaishnav family. Krishna is like a family member to us. And all of us serve our family members with utmost love, care and understanding.

We must serve Krishna considering Him to be our Master as well as our family member.

Serving Krishna means offering our expectation-free / demand-free love to Him. That is what Krishna expects from us, that is what Krishna needs from us...



#### What is expectation-free / demand-free love?



Think about the way we interact with each other in a family...

When we care for someone, we expect/demand that someone cares for us too.

When we do someone a favor, we expect/demand that someone must do us a favor or at least be grateful for it.

When we love someone, we expect/demand that someone loves us.

This someone can be our parents, our brothers/sisters, our friends, our spouse/children...!



Now think about our interaction with a baby...

When we care for a baby, we do not expect/demand care in return. When we bring toys for a baby, we do not expect/demand toys in return. When we love a baby, we do not expect/demand love in return.

We must learn to love Krishna like we love a baby.

Our love for Krishna must be like our love for a baby - expectation-free love, demand-free love, selfless love.

This is very important. It matters a lot more that we serve Krishna with unselfish love than how dutifully we do His Sewa.

Selfless love matters more than the Method in Krishna-Sewa.

Method does matter but never as much as our love for Krishna.

## What does "Loving Krishna" mean?



Bhagwan ShriKrishna says:

"I reside in all beings."

"All beings reside within me."

"All beings are nothing but different forms of mine."

This means that all beings - our family, friends, relatives, colleagues, strangers, animals, birds, etc. and non-living things like rocks, mountains, water, etc. - are nothing but Krishna's different forms with different names.

So, "Love for Krishna" means...

- Loving Krishna by doing His expectation-less/demand-free Sewa at our home
- Loving Krishna by unselfishly respecting & loving everything and everyone around us

"Loving Krishna" means to learn to love like Krishna loves all of us. He loves us all equally without expecting anything in return from us. We can never be Bhagwan Krishna, but we can always learn to selflessly love like Him. It is possible to do so as many have done that.

### How do we learn to love like Krishna?

Our ego drives us to say and do many bad things, to emotionally hurt others, to commit many mistakes. The worst thing that our ego makes us do is to conditionally love others with lots of expectations.

This means that we need to destroy our ego to learn to love like Krishna - love unconditionally, love selflessly and love in expectation-free / demand-free way.

In short, loving Krishna means serving Krishna as well as serving Humanity.

### What do we need to do to destroy our ego - so we learn to love like Krishna ?

PushtiBhaktiMarg shows two different ways. It is better if we can practice both, but we need to practice at least one.

#### (1) Krishna-Sewa

Performing Krishna-Sewa ourselves (without any physical or financial help from anyone else) at our home, we help ourselves in reducing our ego and ego-based possessiveness. That is the main reason why we must do Krishna-Sewa daily.

We can perform daily Krishna-Sewa as much as we can. This can be a 10-minute Sewa or 30-minute Sewa or 60-minute Sewa or a few-hour-long Sewa - whatever is possible based on our personal-professional commitments. It is always better if one can spend more time doing Krishna-Sewa. But the length of time does not really matter much.

**What really matters is the intention as well as intensity of our love for Krishna.**

### Why is Krishna-Sewa to be performed at our home?

By performing Krishna-Sewa at our home we tend to establish and strengthen our personal relationship with Krishna while serving and loving Him as our own personal God.

It is a proven fact that this kind of personal love-relationship can only develop in the privacy of our home and not in the public place like a Temple.

#### **In addition to Krishna-Sewa, we can**

...devote time every day or week helping someone in need

...do some humanitarian work

...do volunteering work in a hospital or nursing homes or social service organizations

...be friendly with anyone and everyone no matter who, no matter what

...can avoid being angry at people



#### **Moreover, we can also have daily practice...**

of asking our own self a question (before going to sleep) ...

"Today, did I say or do anything driven by my ego?"

and, getting an honest answer from within us.

We do not need to involve anyone in this self-dialogue, self-analysis, self-evaluation...

Of course, it involves Krishna as He knows everything that goes on in our head/heart...!



### **(2) Krishna-Katha**

Reading - Listening - chanting - remembering - contemplating Krishna's names, forms, characteristics and leelas (playful divine acts) is "Krishna-Katha".

Practicing Krishna-Katha helps us destroy our ego and ego-based possessiveness. If we practice Krishna-Katha with honesty and regularity, we do not need to do Krishna-Sewa.

### **Power of Intention -- Purposeful Devotion v/s Purposeless Devotion**

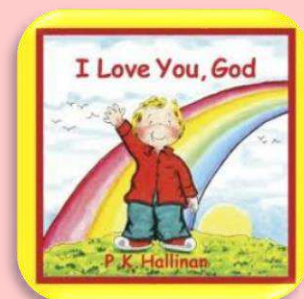
The intention with which one offers devotion to one's God plays a very important role in attaining spirituality via the Path of Devotion. Truly speaking, intention is the only thing that counts! That is the power of intention.

If one worships/serves God with a desire to receive/gain something in return, then it is called 'Purposeful Devotion' ("Sakam Bhakti").

If one worships/serves God without any desire to receive/gain anything in return, then it is called

'Purposeless Devotion' ("Nishkam Bhakti").

Both Nirakar-Nirgun and Sakar-Sagun Bhakti can be Sakam or Nishkam.





## CHAPTER - 24

### Why Do We Need PushtiBhaktiMarg Temples (Havelis) ...?



Some say: "When God is present everywhere, then why do we need a Temple for God? And why do we need to go to a Temple to offer our devotion?"

It is true that God is present everywhere - within us, within others, in all the objects of the universe, all around us. We always read, hear, and speak this fact. But we do not ever experience it!

Because if we experience this fact then we will feel 'one' with all the people and objects around us, we will never be jealous of anyone, we will not be angry with anyone. This means, if we are not experiencing 'oneness' with all the people, all the animals-birds-plants-mountains-trees around us, then we surely do not experience God's presence everywhere even if we know it to be true.

To reach a level where we can experience such 'oneness', we need to follow any of the prescribed Paths of Spirituality. Worshipping God at home or in Temple is one of those proven Paths.



PushtiBhaktiMarg believes that by performing Krishna-Sewa at their homes the Vaishnavs tend to establish and strengthen their personal relationship with Krishna while serving and loving Him as their own personal God. This kind of personal love-relationship with Bhagwan Krishna can only develop in the privacy of home and not in the public place like a Temple.

**BUT does that eliminate the necessity of Temples (Havelis) in PushtiBhaktiMarg?**

**Absolutely NOT...!**

A few Pushti-Gurus and their followers believe that Havelis/Temples have no place in PushtiBhaktiMarg worshipping. They argue that the founder-Guru ShriMahaPrabhuji himself had instructed that no temples should ever be built. They seem to be erring as ShriMahaPrabhuji himself had commissioned building of the first ShriNathji Temple atop Mount Govardhan. His disciple Purnanmal Kshatriya contributed his entire wealth and then some in building the Temple that still exist.



Vaishnav Temples can surely play an increasingly effective role in preserving and propagating Pushti Heritage and Vaishnav values while bringing together the Vaishnav community at large - in India as well as outside India.

Let us examine the role a PushtiBhaktiMarg Temple may play in the life of Vaishnavs...

A Vaishnav Temple offers...

- ❖ An anchor for Vaishnavs' faith in ShriKrishna-as-ShriNathji and PushtiBhaktiMarg
- ❖ A platform for Vaishnavs to share their religious views & experiences
- ❖ A learning center for Vaishnavs to learn Krishna-Sewa practice
- ❖ An exhilarating devotional experience celebrating many festivals
- ❖ An opportunity for spiritual dialogue between Pushti-Gurus and Vaishnavs
- ❖ A facility to sustain and strengthen Vaishnav's love-devotion to Krishna

A Vaishnav Temple provides...

- ❖ A congregation facility for Vaishnavs to come together under one roof
- ❖ An opportunity for like-minded Vaishnavs to build solidarity among themselves
- ❖ A platform to conduct educational - humanitarian - social & cultural activities

Moreover, a Vaishnav Temple with its Shriji-Darshan, Kirtan chanting, spiritual discourses and collective faith of many, creates a highly conducive ambience filled with much positive energy that can benefit all who come to the Temple.

Mahatma Gandhi has said: "I know of no religion or religious tradition (Sampraday) that has done or is doing without its House of God, variously described as a Temple, a Mosque, a Church, a Synagogue or a Parasi Agiyari." ...So true!

PushtiBhaktiMarg is no different than all the other religions/religious traditions. It surely needs its Temples too. Having a Vaishnav Temple never discourages or distracts any Vaishnav from doing Krishna-Sewa at home. As such, it inspires Vaishnavs to bring perfection to their Krishna-Sewa.

Krishna-Sewa at Home as well as Krishna-Sewa in a Vaishnav Temple can co-exist without undercutting each other. Both are never in competition with each other. They complement each other.

### **How can a PushtiBhaktiMarg Temple benefit Vaishnavs in the 21st century...?**

Pushti-Gurus, Temple administrators and Vaishnav communities need to transform Vaishnav Temples from performing only the Krishna-Sewa to doing many other community-benefiting multi-faceted activities...

Vaishnav Temple as *Nandalaya* (Krishna's Home)

Performing Krishna-Sewa as ordained by PushtiBhaktiMarg scriptures and norms

Vaishnav Temple as *Vidyalaya* (place for religious education)

Facilitating education of scriptures, philosophy and practice of PushtiBhaktiMarg

Vaishnav Temple as *Sewalaya* (place for humanitarian service)

Providing logistics and financial support for humanitarian work for the needy of society

Vaishnav Temple as *Kalalaya* (place for learning art)

Facilitating learning of PushtiBhaktiMarg art - Kirtan, musical instrument, flower

garland, delicacies for offering to Krishna, Utsav-Manorath decoration etc.

Vaishnav Temple as *Sanskriti Kendra* (Cultural Center)

Providing facility to learn Indian culture and organize cultural events

Vaishnav Temple as *Samajik Kendra* (Social platform)

Facilitating social gatherings

Note:

It is a reality that NO Vaishnav Temple either conduct humanitarian work or raise funds for the same on regular basis. Some of them conduct such work occasionally in time of natural disasters in USA or India - but nothing on regular basis!

It is also a reality that only a very few Pushti-Gurus involve themselves or motivate Vaishnavs into conducting humanitarian work on a regular basis. PujyaShri IndiraBetiji Mahodaya (Vadodara) was the only Pushti-Guru who regularly conducted humanitarian work throughout her life of 77 years.

Hope the upcoming generation of Vaishnavs  
can change this attitude soon...!





## CHAPTER - 25

### Why Do We Made to Wait for Darshan in Pushti Temples...?



A fulfilling love relationship between two individuals can be attained only when it involves the two seemingly opposing aspects – union and separation. During union, the two enjoy the physical togetherness and during separation, the two intensely remember each other and the moments they shared together. This love-relationship can be of any kind - Parental, friendly or romantic.

Pushti-Bhakti-Marg, a path of love-filled devotion, shows a way to establish a fulfilling personal love-relationship between Krishna and His devotees. The Krishna-Sewa routine is formulized to inspire Vaishnavs to attain such a complete love relationship.

In PushtiBhaktiMarg, Darshan (viewing of God) means to meet Krishna and to feel the joy of being with Him. No-Darshan means to feel the anguish of separation from Krishna and to long for Him. Each Darshan lasts for few minutes only to make the Vaishnavs go through this play of emotions, of togetherness and separation, that would strengthen their love-relationship with Krishna.

In Pushti Havelis, ShriKrishna-as-ShriNathji grants His Darshan eight times a day (mostly six times a day as Gwal and Bhog Darshans are available only in NathDwara, Rajasthan, India). This darshan routine is inspired by Krishna's own daily routine during His time at Vraj.

Darshan	Timing	Duration
Mangala – After Krishna wakes up in the morning	Early Morning	@ 30 Minutes
Shrungar – After Krishna is fully dressed up	Early/Late Morning	@ 30 Minutes
Gwal – As Krishna leaving to graze cows	Early/Late Morning	@ 15 Minutes
Rajbhog – After Krishna has lunch	Noon	@ 45 Minutes
Anausar (No Darshan) – Post-lunch rest	Early Afternoon	@ 3 Hours
Utthapan – After Krishna wakes up in the afternoon	Late Afternoon	@ 15 Minutes
Bhog – After Krishna has afternoon snacks	Late Afternoon	@ 15 Minutes
Sandhya-Aarti – Welcoming Krishna's homecoming	Evening	@ 30 Minutes
Shayan – Before Krishna goes to bed for the night	Night	@ 30 Minutes

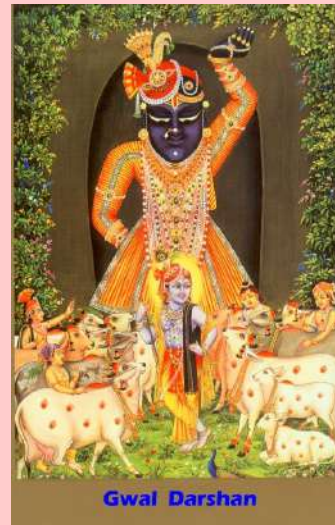
A Vaishnav truly in love with Bhagwan Krishna would be deeply affected by the emotional play of such a Darshan schedule and strengthen her/his love for Bhagwan Krishna. Such a Vaishnav would wait in total silence for the next Darshan instead of chatting away with fellow Vaishnavs.



**Mangala Darshan**



**Shrungar Darshan**



**Gwal Darshan**



**Rajbhog Darshan**



**Utthapan Darshan**



**Bhog Darshan**



**Sandhya-Aarti Darshan**



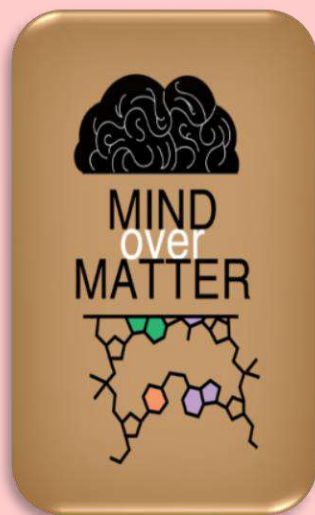
**Shayan Darshan**



## CHAPTER - 26

### Why Do We

Offer **RAAG (KIRTAN)** to ShriKrishna-as-ShriNathji during Krishna-Sewa ...?



#### Introduction:

It is a fact that a high level of concentration is necessary to achieve a goal. Even though there are many ways to achieve the required concentration, it is easy to concentrate on doing whatever interests us the most. This means, our keen interest in an activity makes us easily attain a higher level of concentration that helps us achieve our goal sooner. When talking to someone, reading a novel or watching a TV show or a film generates intense interest in us, we do not get bored or tired of doing it repeatedly or constantly. Such behavior is a great example of the "Mind over Matter" principle .... When the "mind" does not mind, the body never minds...! This is a psychological fact.

In PushtiBhaktiMarg, Krishna-Sewa is the way to experience the bliss of Krishna's love (just as Gopis of Vraj experienced) by consciously and continuously diminishing our ego and possessiveness. The attainment of these goals requires our total concentration. Using the psychologically proven fact that we effortlessly concentrate on activities that interest us, PushtiBhaktiMarg's Founder-Guru Shrimad Vallabhacharyaji's younger son ShriVitthalnathji (ShriGusainji) has introduced three catalysts (things that help advance a process) that are supposed to be very effective that help generate more interest in performing Krishna-Sewa. These catalysts are...

Raag (Kirtan) --	Devotional singing depicting only our love for Krishna
Bhog --	Offering delicious meals to Krishna
Shrungar --	Adorning Krishna with clothes, ornaments, flowers etc.

Even though expressing our love-filled devotion to Bhagwan Krishna is the primary motivation to perform Krishna-Sewa (ShriNathji-Sewa), these catalysts help us strengthen our love and the devotion.



#### RAAG

'Raag' means ...

... Attachment, affection, love.

... A melodic mode (musical framework) of Indian classical music.

... 'Kirtan' - the devotional songs.

... 'Kirtan' - the devotional singing.



'Raag' as a catalyst for PushtiBhaktiMarg style Krishna-Sewa means singing love-devotion filled kirtans for Bhagwan ShriKrishna-as-ShriNathji.



Kirtan is a simple and powerful way to meditate. As we flow with the lyrics, the melody and the rhythm, meditation becomes joyful and effortless. Kirtan singing/listening is a means of finding our way back to the core of our being, to our heart and to our connection with others. It empowers us to strongly connect with Krishna while our love grows to include all beings.

Kirtan is love-devotion-strengthening. Kirtan singing sounds better if one is a trained singer, but it is not necessary to be a trained singer. Singing from the heart with love and devotion is more important than a trained melodious voice.

In his book 'Nirodh-Lakshanam', ShriMahaPrabhuji instructs: "A Krishna-devotee, singing Krishna's praise through kirtan, attains the highest level of consciousness (*Chaitanya*) and bliss (*Anand*) that is not attainable by others."

Kirtan-Listening (with the ears as well as the mind) as well as Kirtan-singing in the musical framework (Raag) of Indian classical music has profound healing power for our emotional as well as physical disorders. Kirtan is known to cure several illnesses. A few examples....

Disorder	Healing Raag	
Stress, Anxiety	Bhairavi	
Asthma, Chronic Headache	Darbari	
Cold, Cough, Chronic Headache, Asthma	Kedar	
Vaat Vyadhi (stomach gas caused problems), Low Blood Pressure	Malkauns	
High Blood Pressure	Pahadi	
Colitis, Acidity	Puriya	
Heart diseases	Shivranjani	
Arthritis	Yaman-Kalyan	

Thus, Kirtan singing/listening has many spiritual as well as medicinal benefits.

In PushtiBhaktiMarg Temples, traditionally, kirtan singing (*Haveli Sangeet*) follows these norms...

- ❖ Kirtans are sung in 'Drupad (Dhruvpad) Dhamar' style of Indian classical music.
- ❖ The main Raag (musical framework) used for kirtan are...  
Dev-Gandhar, Ramkali, Bhairav, Vibhas, Malkauns, Bilawal, Lalit, Suha, Sudharai, Todi, Aasavari, Dhanashri, Sarang, Nat, Purvi, Gauri, Jaitshri, Khamaj, Sorath, Kalyan, Iman, Kanhara, Nayaki, Hamir, Kedar, Adana, Maru, Malav, Basant, Malhar, Kafi, Jaijivanti, Rayasa, Vihag.

- ❖ The main musical instruments used are...  
Tanpura (Tambura), Pakhavaj (Mrudang), Veena, Sarangi, Flute, Khanjari, Duff, Zanz, Kinnari, Upang, Harmonium (introduced later)
- ❖ Kirtans are sung for ShriKrishna-as-ShriNathji's entire daily routine...
  - When He wakes up
  - When He is having breakfast
  - When He grants Mangala Darshan
  - When He is getting ready- bathing, putting on clothes, jewelry, flower garlands
  - When He grants Shrungar Darshan
  - When He is having mid-morning snacks
  - When He grants Gwal Darshan
  - When He is having Lunch
  - When He grants Rajbhog Darshan
  - When He wakes up after the afternoon nap
  - When He grants Utthapan Darshan
  - When He is having afternoon snacks
  - When He grants Bhog Darshan
  - When He is being welcomed, at dusk time, on His return with the herds of cows from the green pastures
  - When He grants Sandhya-Aarti Darshan
  - When He is having dinner
  - When He grants Shayan Darshan
  - When He goes to bed (Ashray Pad also sung at this instance)
- ❖ Appropriate kirtans are sung on various Utsav (festival) days.
- ❖ Kirtans are sung in "Raag" (melodic mode, musical framework) that is appropriate for the time (morning-thru-night) of the day as well as the seasons ("Ritu")...
  - "Shishir Ritu" (Winter - January-February)
  - "Vasant Ritu" (Spring - March-April)
  - "Grishm Ritu" (Summer - May-June)
  - "Varsha Ritu" (Monsoon - July-August)
  - "Sharad Ritu" (Autumn - September-October)
  - "Hemant Ritu" (Fall - November-December)
- ❖ The subject matter of Kirtans is always limited to the description of Krishna's various names, forms, characteristics and the leelas.
- ❖ The subject matter of Kirtans must never contain any kind of pleading or appealing to Krishna, gratitude towards Krishna or demands for one's benefit.
- ❖ Kirtans written, in the language of Vraj (Vraj-Bhasha), by PushtiBhaktiMarg's devotional poets such as "Ashta-Sakha" (Surdasji, Krushnadasji, Kumbhandasji, Parmananddasji, Govindswamiji, Chhitswamiji, Nanddasji, Chaturbhujdasji), Raskhanji, Shri Harirajji and a few others, can only be sung as part of Krishna-Sewa.



- ❖ Other than kirtans, only two "Stotras" (Prayers) -- 'Krushnashray' and 'Madhurashtak' -- may be recited during Krishna-Sewa. This is because 'Krushnashray' declares that Krushna is the sole refuge for all and 'Madhurashtak' praises Krushna's personality and activities. Both are written by Shrimad Vallabhacharyaji.
- ❖ Other devotional songs (like "Bhajan") are never sung during Krishna-Sewa.
- ❖ Kirtan singers ("Kirtankar") must observe the traditional dress code of Dhoti-Bandi and Topi or Paghadi (head-covering).
- ❖ Kirtan singers need to remember that they are singing kirtans only for the pleasure of ShriKrishna-as-ShriNathji and not for the pleasure of any other listeners.
- ❖ Kirtan singers need to sing kirtans with utmost love and devotion in their hearts.

Rupa Poria was the security guard of the ShriNathji's temple atop Mount Govardhan. He was a devout Vaishnav who loved to sing kirtans while on duty at night. He was not a trained singer-musician and so could not sing like the "Ashta-Sakha" poet-singers of ShriNathji. Once, Govindswamiji heard him singing in his non-melodious voice and rebuked him to refrain from singing. Next morning, ShriGusainji noticed ShriNathji having red eyes when he went to wake Him up. When asked, ShriNathji mentioned that he could not sleep the entire night as Rupa Poria stopped singing kirtans. After proper inquiry, ShriGusainji invited both Govindswamiji and Rupa Poria. He said to Govindswamiji: "Having melodious voice and knowledge of music add to the kirtan singing but having love-devotion for ShriNathji is much more important. He is lot more pleased with devotee's love for Him. So, you should not have rebuked and stopped Rupa from singing." He said to Rupa: "ShrijiBawa is very pleased with your love and so please keep on singing kirtans as you were."

This story elaborates the fact that Kirtans must be offered to ShrijiBawa with utmost love and devotion as well as the fact that Shriji does not give any importance to any flows one may have in observing the established traditions.





## CHAPTER - 27

### Why Do We

### Offer **BHOG** to ShriKrishna-as-ShriNathji during Krishna-Sewa ...?



#### **BHOG**

'Bhog' means the meals that are served to ShriKrishna-as-ShriNathji. It is an important part of PushtiBhaktiMarg Krishna-Sewa to serve several types of meals at different times of the day to ShriKrishna-ShriNathji. This is because Krishna-Sewa is based on the daily routine of child-Krishna and a devotee assumes the role of a mother taking care of Him as well as trying to please Him using all possible means. Since many food items are inappropriate for all seasons, the various meal items are prepared considering the season of the year.

Let us get familiar with some terminology associated with Bhog.

#### ***Samagri***

means the groceries - grains, spices, vegetables, fruits, etc. - that is used in preparing meals for Krishna. It also means the delicacies (also called *Anna-Samagri*) that form the various meals served to Krishna.

It is customary to always offer unused, unshared pure things to the one we Love as a demonstration of our intense love.

Owing to this fact, PushtiBhaktiMarg observes a norm to offer unused, unadulterated, unshared, pure things to Krishna to symbolize devotee's utmost love filled devotion to Krishna.

To observe this Krishna-Sewa norm it is important to always keep groceries for Krishna's meals separate from groceries for family's meals and never mix them. The family must not use any grocery items from groceries set aside for preparing Krishna's meals or vice-versa.

This norm also means that the delicacies prepared for Krishna are not shared with anyone before they are served to Krishna.

#### ***Bhog***

means the various meals that are offered to ShriKrishna-as-ShriNathji during the course of Sewa. These meals must be prepared with love and devotion, keeping in mind that they are being served to a child-Krishna who can consume only moderately spicy food.

#### ***Prasad***

Once ShriKrishna-as-ShriNathji accepts the Bhog, it becomes Prasad for the devotees. Prasad must be consumed with love and respect.

Of course, this does not mean (as some believe) that one should not warm up Prasad or spice it up for one's consumption and/or throw away spoiled Prasad.

The dedicated (*Samarpit*) Vaishnavs strictly practice the norm to only consume the food items that are already offered to Krishna. These Vaishnavs prepare the food they like but consume it only after first offering it to their beloved Krishna who they serve at their home.

The different categories of delicacies (*Bhog*), served to Krishna, are...

**Dudh-Ghar** These are made using milk, ghee, sugar, fruits, dry fruits, rajgara seeds, vegetables (shingoda, suran, potato, ratalu), peanuts, dates, etc.  
Examples: Penda, Burfi, Halva, Koparapak, Basundi, Rasgulla, etc.

**Nagari** These are made using ghee, flour and sugar. These preparations do not use water (except coconut water or squash extract), milk, and yogurt.  
Examples: Magaj, Gol-Papdi, Chana-or-Mung-Ladoo, Popcorn, Panjari, etc.

**Anna-Sakhadi** All kinds of sweets and baked/fried appetizers made using different types of flour, sugar, jaggery, water, milk, yogurt, etc. Ghee is used for frying but not oil. Regular salt is not used. Black salt (*Sindhav*) also is not used as an ingredients but can be sprinkled over when needed.

Examples: Mohanthal, Thor, Ghughara, Ghari, Tavapuri, Manohar, Lapasi, Manbhog (Shira), Dahivada, Farsi-Puri, Khaja, Muthia, etc.

**Sakhadi** All preparations that use oil, regular salt, and/or water along with other ingredients. Examples: Roti, Bati, Puri, Chila, Rice, Dal, Kadhi, Shak, Kathol, Ganthia, Kachori, Bhajia, etc.

### What cannot be used as ingredients in preparing Bhog...

Onion, Garlic, Carrot, Red Tomatoes, Watermelon, Beetle (Mogari), Cabbage, Radish, Cauliflower, Masoor Dal, Eggplant during rainy season.

In PushtiBhaktiMarg Temples (Haveli) very elaborate meals are served according to the age-old traditions as set by the descendants of Shrimad Vallabhacharyaji.

Multiple meals (Bhog) are served to ShriKrishna-as-ShriNathji during the day. They are...

Bhog	Served when...	Serving at least...
Mangala (Breakfast)	Before Mangala Darshan	Milk, Butter, Rock-Sugar (Misri), Sweet balls (Laddoo), etc.
Gwal (Snacks)	Before Gwal Darshan	Milk-Foam, Butter, Rock Sugar (Misri), Laddoo, Mathari (sweet) etc.
Rajbhog (Lunch)	Before Rajbhog Darshan	Roti (made from various flours), Bati (kind of bread), Vegetable, Dal, Kadhi, Rice, Yogurt, Papad, Raita, Sweets, Savory appetizers, Milk, etc.
Utthapan	After Utthapan Darshan	Seasonal fruits, fruit drinks, etc.
Shayan (Dinner)	Before Shayan Darshan	Poori, Vegetables, Mung Dal, Raita, Yogurt, savory appetizers, Sweets, Milk, etc.
Bunta	At Night Time	A box ( <i>'Bunta'</i> ) is filled with Sweets, Dry Fruits, Mishri, etc. and placed near Krishna's bed ( <i>'Shaiyya'</i> ).

### Bhog at Vaishnav's home

Owing to the norms for Krishna-Sewa at home, a Vaishnav may serve meals according to the availability of time, effort and money.

There are several ways a Vaishnav may practice offering Bhog to Krishna:

- Mishri Bhog Offering dry fruits, fruits, rock sugar (Mishri) and maybe milk and sweet butter (*Makhan*)

- Anna-Sakhadi Bhog                      Offering Mishri Bhog items and variety of sweets
- Sakhadi Bhog                              Offering complete meal/s with Sakhadi items in addition to Anna-Sakhadi items

Please remember,

Selecting one of these Bhog-offering ways does not make one Vaishnav better or lesser than the other. It also does not make one Vaishnav closer to or farther away from Krishna. Many Vaishnavs who offer Sakhadi Bhog as part of their Krishna-Sewa falsely and wrongly consider themselves to be better than the Vaishnavs offering Mishri Bhog.

Of course, offering Sakhadi Bhog instead of Mishri Bhog makes a Vaishnav spend lot more time in Krishna-Sewa increasing Vaishnav's involvement with Krishna, multifold.

But the only thing that really matters is the intensity of love and devotion of a Vaishnav for Krishna.





## CHAPTER - 28

### Why Do We

Offer **SHRUNGAR** to ShriKrishna-as-ShriNathji during Krishna-Sewa ...?

#### SHRUNGAR (SHRINGAR)



It is a psychological fact that we tend to look at, stare at people and/or objects for a much longer time if and only if people are well-dressed with proper clothes/jewelry and objects are well-decorated with eye-pleasing colors. An untidily dressed person rarely draws our attention and definitely never holds our attention for longer period of time.

This psychological fact motivated ShriGusainji to start a tradition to adorn ShriKrishna-as-ShriNathji with a variety of cloths made from fine fabrics, exquisitely made jewelry, garlands made from sweet smelling beautiful flowers.

In addition, imaginative, artistic, and eye-pleasing decorative items are used when offering numerous

*Manorath* (Devotee's desire to do something magnificent for the pleasure of Krishna) and celebrating the PushtiBhaktiMarg Utsavs (festivals).

Of course, no one or nothing can make Krishna more handsome than He already is...! This is because the beauty (that we see all around us in people, objects and nature) has come only from Krishna and no one else. So, how can we make Krishna - the original and only source of beauty - more handsome...?!!

So, we adorn Him only because that makes us look at Him more intently, with more attention and with more interest.

We adorn Him only to motivate us to do His Darshan (watching with the eyes as well as the mind) instead of just looking at Him.

We adorn Him so that He captivates us, mesmerizes us and entices us to fall deeply in love with Him forever.

Different customs for daily as well as Utsav/Manorath day Shrunigar exist for the different seats (Gruh, Pith) of PushtiBhaktiMarg's Guru-family. Certain common norms, based on seasonal changes, for clothing and ornaments are observed by all.

Ornaments are offered beginning at Krishna's feet (*Shri-Charan*) and then progressively going upwards all the way to Krishna's head (*Shri-Mastak*).

A few examples of the types of ornaments are:

	Ornaments
Feet	Nakh-Bhushan and Vichhuva for toes
Ankle	Ankle bracelets -- Nupur, Toda, Payal, Zehar
Waist	Kati-Mekhala, Kinkani, Kshudra-Ghantika and Venu (flute), Vetra (stick)
Fingers	Mudrika (Ring), Aarati
Wrist	Pahonchi, Kangan, Kada, Chakda, Hast-Phool
Arm	Baju-Bandh
Neck	Hansuli, Kanthi, Kathula, Hamel, Dau-Mala, Ti-Mala, Chau-Mala, Gunja-Mala, ...
Chin	Chibuk Heera (Diamond)
Nose	Nak-Vesar (Nose Ring)
Eye	Alankar
Forehead	Tilak, Alkavali
Ears	Karnful, Kundal (Mayura-krut, Makara-krut, Meen-krut)
Hair	Choti (Braided hair)
Head	Mukut, different types of Chandrika, Morpinchh-Chandrika, Tipara, Kalagi, Shehra, Sheerpech, Kirit, Katara, Sheeshphul, Pagh (different types), Kulhe, Dumala, Fenta,...



At least, Morpinchh-Chandrika and Gunja-Mala are offered if nothing else is available.

Even though PushtiBhaktiMarg accepts ShriYamunaji as the consort (wife) of Krishna as well as Mother-Goddess of Vaishnavs, it does not practice worshipping any of the four consorts (Radhaji, Chandravaliji, Radha-sahachariji & Yamunaji) separately from ShriKrishna-as-ShriNathji.



Some of the shringar items - such as ankle-bracelet (Nupur), nose-ring (Nak-Vesar), braided-hair (Choti) - that are offered to ShriNathji are feminine in nature and symbolizes the presence of Krishna's consorts (*Swaminiji*) along with ShriKrishna-as-ShriNathji.



The type of fabric, for Krishna's attire, varies according to the season. Satin fabric (lined with cotton fibers), Kinkhab fabric for winter, white cotton fabric for Holi-Khel-days (Vasantpanchmi -thru- Dolotsav), light colored light-weight cotton fabric (like 'Mulmul') for summer and bright colored cotton fabric (like Leheria, Chundadi) for monsoon. A cotton-filled comforter is also offered during winter.

We can follow one cardinal rule while dressing up Krishna - the rule is to have Krishna wear the clothes made from fabric that we would use in a certain season.

This follows the principle of “Yatha Dehe Tatha Deve” meaning, whatever clothing would suit us, same would suit Krishna. Meaning... When we feel chilly then have Him wear heavy, warm, dark-colored clothes and when we feel warm then have Him wear lighter, cooler, soft-colored clothes.

Fragrant liquid made from flowers are offered to ShrijiBawa. These are commonly known as “Attar” or “Sugandhi” in PushtiBhaktiMarg terminology.

The kind of Sugandhi used is based on the season per below cited norms:

Season	Sugandhi (Attar)
Winter	Hina, Kasturi, Kesar, Ambar, Kamal
Summer	Khus, Jaai, Jui, Mogara, Borsalli (Bakul), Raat-rani, Kadamb, Gulab, Sondho
Monsoon	Gul-chhadi, Champa, Kevado, Parijaat, Gulab, Mati, Paanadi





## CHAPTER - 29

### Why Do We Offer 'Krushnashray' and 'Madhurashtak' Prayers to ShriKrishna-as-ShriNathji during Krishna-Sewa ...?

Prayer is the way to remember God.

The God is the most powerful of all and He loves us all. Naturally, we would feel safer knowing that God's power and love will protect us always.

By saying Prayers, we appeal God... to protect us, to make us fearless, to guide us and to help us become better person.

Each time we remember God out of Pain, Suffering, Despair, Thankfulness, Love, Hope, and Happiness – It is a Prayer.

People following different religions remember God for many reasons ...

To REQUEST	God	to give us what we desire
To COMPLAIN	God	for the troubles in our lives
To PLEAD	God	for protection
To SEEK	God's	help
To APPEAL	God	to help someone who needs it
To THANK	God	for giving us what we have
To ACCEPT	God's	sovereignty
To OFFER	God	Love & Respect



#### **BUT**

PushtiBhaktiMarg's Founder-Guru Shrimad Vallabhacharyaji (ShriMahaprabhuji) has suggested to his Vaishnavs never to offer their prayers to Bhagwan Krishna to request, complain, plead, seek, appeal or thank. ShriVallabh has advised Vaishnavs to offer prayers to Bhagwan Krishna only to praise His name, form, characteristics and leelas.

It is a fact that Bhagwan Krishna always knows what is best for us. He also knows what, when and how much to give each one of us based on His take on what we deserve. He knows how and when to help us, protect us. He is always there to fulfill all our basic needs, but He may not fulfill our desires and demands that we think we deserve.

But the way we are, we do not readily accept this fact...!

We keep on requesting-complaining-pleading-seeking-appealing Bhagwan Krishna. When our desires/demands are not fulfilled (even though our needs are met) we feel devastated, disappointed, depressed and stressed out.

So, the intention behind ShriVallabh's suggestion may have been to save his Vaishnavs from the extreme stress caused by devastating disappointments they may experience even after requesting-complaining-pleading-seeking-appealing all-powerful ShriKrishna.

ShriVallabh has specifically instructed Vaishnavs to offer their prayers to Bhagwan ShriKrishna (ShriNathji) ONLY.....

- ❖ To chant His name (*Naam*)
- ❖ To adore His form (*Roop*)
- ❖ To praise His virtues (*Guna*)
- ❖ To remember His past-times (*Leela*)
- ❖ To express our Faith, Love, Respect, Devotion to Him

According to PushtiBhaktiMarg norm, Vaishnavs should sing the devotional songs (*Kirtan*) that are written by the great devotee-poets (mainly Ashta-Sakhas) who focused only on praise of Bhagwan Krishna and their self-experiences of Him and nothing else.

In addition to these Kirtans, Vaishnavs can recite ONLY two prayers (Stotras) that are written by ShriVallabh to praise Bhagwan ShriKrishna-as-ShriNathji and to express feelings of faith and dedication to Him.

### Krushnashray

'Krushnashray' is the prayer (Stotra) written by PushtiBhaktiMarg's Founder-Guru MahaPrabhu Shrimad Vallabhacharyaji. It is one of the sixteen books, commonly known as "Shodash Granth", written by ShriMahaPrabhuji to guide his Vaishnavs.

This is a prayer...

- ❖ To accept Bhagwan Krishna as our only refuge (support, protection).
- ❖ To declare that having Bhagwan Krishna as the one and only Protector and having utmost faith in Him is the only means available on the Path of Pushti.
- ❖ Never to indulge into requesting-complaining-pleading-seeking-appealing all-powerful Bhagwan Krishna.



'Krushnashray' explains that...

The true meaning and the essence of the means and the methods for worshipping, as described in the scriptures, had been corrupted in the present time. Utilizing these prescribed means and methods would not help anyone experience Krishna's Love.

And so...

The only pure means and the untainted method is to have absolute faith in Krishna and accept Him as the sole supporter and protector.

This is the only way one can experience Krishna's Love.

## || KRUSHNASHRAY ||

(1)

Sarv-Marge-Shu Nashteshu  
Kalau Cha Khal-Dharmini  
Pashand-Prachure Loke  
Krushna Eva Gatir-mam

(2)

Mlechha-Krante-Shu Deshe-Shu  
Pa-Paik-Nilye-Shu Cha  
Satpeeda-Vyagra-Loke-Shu  
Krushna Eva Gatir-mam

(3)

Ganga-Dee-Tirth-Varye-Shu  
Dushtai-Reva-Vrute-Sviha ...  
Tiro-Hita-Dhi-Daive-Shu  
Krushna Eva Gatir-mam

(4)

Ahamkaar-Vimoodhe-Shu  
Satsu Papa-Nu-Varti-Shu  
Laabh-Poojarth-Yatne-Shu  
Krushna Eva Gatir-mam

(5)

Apari-Gyan-Nashte-Shu  
Mantre-Shva-Vrat-Yogi-Shu  
Tirohitarth-Daive-Shu  
Krushna Eva Gatir-mam

(6)

Nana-Vad-Vinashte-Shu  
Sarv-Karm-Vrata-Di-Shu  
Pashandaik-Prayatne-Shu  
Krushna Eva Gatir-mam

(1)

People are immoral, malicious and scandalous. The means and the methods of the Spiritual paths are all corrupted. Having absolute faith in Krishna is the only means and the method to pursue Spirituality, in this terrible time

(2)

The non-believers and the evil-doers are on the rise in the country. Moral people are being harassed. Krishna is my only refuge (in this terrible time).

(3)

All the places of pilgrimage have veiled their power to purify the pilgrims as they have been taken over by the evil people. Krishna is my only refuge (in this terrible time).

(4)

The religious scholars have become egoistic. Their greed is making them not stand up to the evil doers. They perform religious rituals in improper and ignorant manner. Krishna is my only refuge (in this terrible time).

(5)

The Mantras, as integral part of religious rituals, are being recited with improper pronunciations and without observing the prescribed norms. And so, the divinity of the Mantras is veiled. Krishna is my only refuge (in this terrible time).

(6)

All religious rituals have been corrupted due to rigid and unhealthy arguments over them. Hypocrisy and corruption have crept into the observance of the religious rituals. Krishna is my only refuge (in this terrible time).



(7)

Ajamil-Di-Dosha-nam  
Nashko-Nu-Bhave Shthi-tah  
Gna-Pita-Khil-Mahat-mya  
Krushna Eva Gatir-mam

(8)

Pra-Kruta-ha Sácala Deva  
Ganita-Nand-Kam Bruta  
Poorna-Nando Harist-smat  
Krushna Eva Gatir-mam

(9)

Vivek-Dhairya-Bhaktya-Di  
Rahi-Tasya Vishe-Shatah  
Papa-Saktasya Dina-Sya  
Krushna Eva Gatir-mam

(10)

Sarv-Samarthya-Sahitah  
Sarv-Traiva Khilarth-Krut  
Sharan-stha-Samudhharam  
Krushnam Vigyaa  
Paya-Myaham

(11)

Krushna-Shrayam  
Midam Stotram  
Yah Pathet  
Krushna-Sanni-Dhau  
Tasyaa-Shrayo Bhavet Krushna  
Eeti Shri-Vallabho-Braveet

(7)

Bhagwan Krishna demonstrates His capability and willingness to destroy sins of the ones chosen by Him (like when evil-doer Ajamil was pardoned on his deathbed). Krishna is my only refuge (in this terrible time).

(8)

All the Gods/Goddesses (other than Bhagwan Krishna) are constrained by their temperament and their bliss (*Anand*) is limited. Krishna is the limitless bliss Himself. So, Krishna is my only refuge (in this terrible time).

(9)

For someone without Discernment (acceptance of the fact that only Krishna calls the shots in our lives), without Endurance (ability to continue against all odds) and without Devotion (ability to offer love & respect to Krishna), Krishna is the only refuge (in this terrible time).

(10)

Krishna, the Omnipotent, Omnipresent, Omniscient, is capable of granting anything to anyone. Krishna supports and protects anyone who comes to Him in total submission. Krishna is my only refuge (in this terrible time).

(11)

ShriVallabh instructs that one who recites Krushnashray stotra In the auspicious presence of Krishna (at home or in a Temple) shall always be supported and protected by Krishna.

**Note:**

During Sewa, in addition to Kirtan, no other Prayer (Stotra/Stuti) except Krushnashray and Madhurashtakam may be offered to ShriKrishna-as-ShriNathji.

This does not mean that these two prayers can not be recited at other times. They can be recited anytime, anywhere.

## MADHURASHTAKAM

'Madhurastakam' is the prayer (Stotra) written by PushtiBhaktiMarg's Founder-Guru MahaPrabhu Shrimad Vallabhacharyaji. It was created & recited by ShriMahaPrabhuji when he had his first face-to-face meeting with ShriNathji Prabhu atop Mount Govardhan. 'Madhurastakam' is an expression of love. Praising ShriKrishna-as-ShriNathji strengthens devotee's Love-Devotion. This melodious prayer is very easy to sing.



Madhura --Divine, Charming, Charismatic, Lovely  
Ashtakam --Song of eight stanzas

(1)

Adharam Madhuram,  
Vadanam Madhuram  
Nayanam Madhuram,  
Hasitam Madhuram  
Hridayam Madhuram,  
Gamanam Madhuram  
Madhuradhipate  
Rakhilam Madhuram

(2)

Vachanam Madhuram,  
Charitam Madhuram  
Vasanam Madhuram,  
Valitam Madhuram  
Chalitam Madhuram,  
Bhramitam Madhuram  
Madhuradhipate  
Rakhilam Madhuram

(3)

Venur Madhuro,  
Renur Madhurah  
Paanir Madhurah,  
Padau Madhurau  
Nrityam Madhuram,  
Sakhyam Madhuram  
Madhuradhipate  
Rakhilam Madhuram

(1)

Lips are Divine,  
Face is Divine  
Eyes are Divine,  
Smile is Divine  
Heart is Divine,  
Gait is Divine

The Lord of Charm (ShriKrishna-ShriNathji)  
is overwhelmingly Charismatic.

(2)

Speech is Divine,  
Act is Divine  
Dress is Divine,  
Stance is Divine  
Walk is Divine,  
Wandering is Divine

The Lord of Charm (ShriKrishna-ShriNathji)  
is overwhelmingly Charismatic.

(3)

Flute is Divine,  
Sand is Divine  
Hands are Divine,  
Feet are Divine  
Dance is Divine,  
Friendship is Divine

The Lord of Charm (ShriKrishna-ShriNathji)  
is overwhelmingly Charismatic.

(4)

Gitam Madhuram,  
Pitam Madhuram  
Bhuktam Madhuram,  
Suptam Madhuram  
Rupam Madhuram,  
Tilakam Madhuram  
Madhuradhipate  
Rakhilam Madhuram

(5)

Karanam Madhuram,  
Taranam Madhuram  
Haranam Madhuram,  
Ramanam Madhuram  
Vamitam Madhuram,  
Shamitam Madhuram  
Madhuradhipate  
Rakhilam Madhuram

(6)

Gunja Madhura,  
Mala Madhura  
Yamuna Madhura,  
Vichi Madhura  
Salilam Madhuram,  
Kamalam Madhuram  
Madhuradhipate  
Rakhilam Madhuram

(7)

Gopi Madhura,  
Leela Madhura  
Yuktam Madhuram,  
Bhuktam Madhuram  
Drashtam Madhuram,  
Shishtam Madhuram  
Madhuradhipate  
Rakhilam Madhuram

(4)

Singing is Divine,  
Drinking is Divine  
Eating is Divine,  
Sleeping is Divine  
Form is Divine,  
Tilak is Divine  
The Lord of Charm (ShriKrishna-ShriNathji)  
is overwhelmingly Charismatic.

(5)

Deeds are Divine,  
Swimming is Divine  
Stealing is Divine,  
Playing is Divine  
Speaking is Divine,  
Silence is Divine  
The Lord of Charm (ShriKrishna-ShriNathji)  
is overwhelmingly Charismatic.

(6)

Beads are Divine,  
Garland is Divine  
Yamuna is Divine,  
Waves are Divine  
Water is Divine,  
Lotus is Divine  
The Lord of Charm (ShriKrishna-ShriNathji)  
is overwhelmingly Charismatic.

(7)

Gopis are Divine,  
Games are Divine  
Meeting is Divine,  
Separating is Divine  
Glance is Divine,  
Manners are Divine  
The Lord of Charm (ShriKrishna-ShriNathji)  
is overwhelmingly Charismatic.



(8)

Gopa Madhura,  
Gavo Madhura  
Yashtir Madhura,  
Srushtir Madhura  
Dalitam Madhuram,  
Falitam Madhuram  
Madhuradhipate  
Rakhilam Madhuram

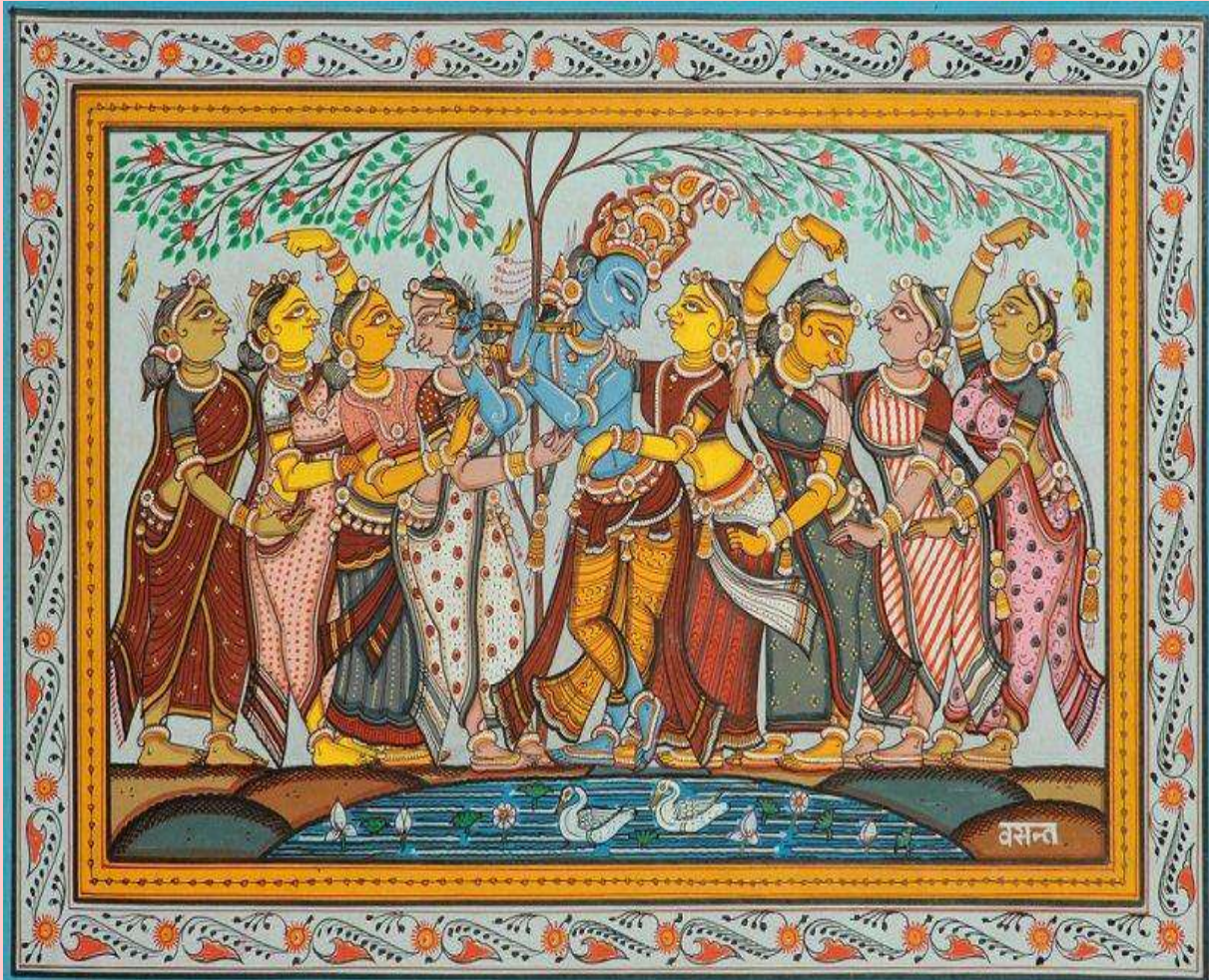
(8)

Gopas are Divine,  
Cows are Divine  
Cane is Divine,  
Creation is Divine  
Duality is Divine,  
Union is Divine  
The Lord of Charm (ShriKrishna-ShriNathji)  
is overwhelmingly Charismatic.

**Note:**

During Sewa, in addition to Kirtan, no other Prayer (Stotra/Stuti) except Krushnashray and Madhurashtakam may be offered to ShriKrishna-as-ShriNathji.

This does not mean that these two prayers can not be recited at other times. They can be recited anytime, anywhere.

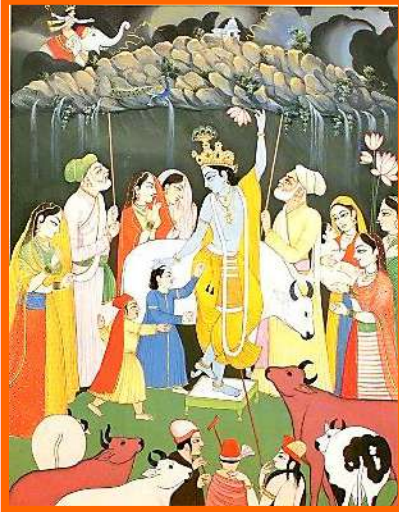


## CHAPTER - 30

### Why Do We Offer Annakut to ShriKrishna-as-ShriNathji ...?

“Annakut” (Anna=Food, Kut=Heap) means a heap of food delicacies being offered to God. This religious tradition was initiated in PushtiBhaktiMarg based on the Govardhan Leela performed by Bhagwan Krishna as described in Shrimad Bhagwat, a Hinduism scripture.

#### Govardhan Leela



Bhagwan Krishna, during his childhood years spent in Vraj, performed many Leela for the innocent amusement of himself and his cowherd (Gop) and milkmaid (Gopi) friends of Vraj. He performed these Leela to purify the minds and hearts of the Vraj residents (Vrajvasi) as well as to bless them with His divine love.

Every year Vrajvasi celebrated the end of monsoon by worshipping the Rain-God IndraDev. They offered IndraDev a grand feast (Annakut) as a gesture of gratitude for providing Vraj with ample water.

Seven-year-old Krishna convinced Vrajvasi that they should be thankful to Mount Govardhan (Giriraj) as it was mainly responsible for collecting and channeling the rainwater into the reservoirs around Vraj. Krishna further convinced Vrajvasi that Mount Govardhan would come alive and accept the grand feast in person from all Vrajvasi. Being the Supreme God Himself, Krishna planned to assume the form of Mount Govardhan.

Always happy to go along with their beloved prodigy child hero Krishan, the Vrajvasi agreed to offer Annakut to Mount Govardhan the day after Diwali, a festival of light and a day to celebrate victory of good over evil.

Home prepared delicacies were brought to Mount Govardhan at the spot now known as “ShriGirirajji Mukharvind” – the pious face of Mount Govardhan. Vrajvasi performed puja (worship ritual) of ShriGirirajji. The mountain came alive in human form and consumed the delicacies as offered by awed, ecstatic and overwhelmed with joy Vrajvasi. They named their new God as ShriGovardhanNath, God of Mount Govardhan.

IndraDev waited for his grand feast that never arrived. The furiously angry IndraDev attacked Vraj with torrential rains to drown out Vraj and Vrajvasi. Krishna raised Mount Govardhan with the pinky finger of His left hand and saved all Vrajvasi and all animals from flash floods.

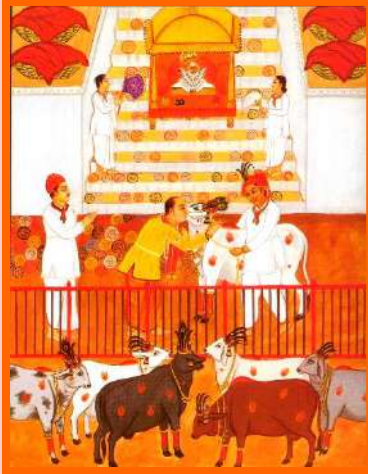
Ultimately, IndraDev realized that Krishna was the Supreme God. He came to apologize for his arrogance and the damage, he caused around Vraj. Krishna pardoned him. Vrajvasi



also pleasantly realized that their beloved child Krishna was the Supreme God who came down to Vraj to spend time with them.

This is known as Govardhan Leela. Krishna performed this Leela to redirect Vrajvasi's devotion to Gods like IndraDev towards Him, the Supreme God and transform it into love-filled devotion.

### Annakut Festival - PushtiBhaktiMarg Tradition



There are three major pre-Annakut events.

#### Kan-Jagai (Inviting cows)

During “Shayan” Darshan on the evening before the Annakut day, cows are brought to the Temple. The cows are invited to participate in the “Govardhan Puja” (ritualistic worshipping of Mount Govardhan) in the morning of the Annakut day. The invitation is whispered into their ears (“Kan”).



#### Hatadi Manorath (Setting up a shop)

During “Shayan” Darshan on the evening before the Annakut day, ShriNathji Prabhu sets up a shop of spices, grains, sweets, perfumes, jewelry, etc. A scale and weights made from gold and silver are also placed for Prabhu to weigh the items. The idea is to provide supplies to Vrajvasi to prepare for the Annakut.



ShriNathji Prabhu plays “Chopat” (Checkers) all night long during the night before Annakut day. Since Prabhu has not slept at all, He gives the Mangala darshan, on the morning of Annakut Day, in the same clothes and jewelry He was wearing the day before.

#### Govardhan Puja



Govardhan Puja (worship ritual) is performed in presence of ShriNathji Prabhu's Lalan Swaroop. In the morning of the Annakut day, after Mangala darshan, Govardhan Puja is performed. A replica of Mount Govardhan (Shri Girirajji) is made from a mixture of cow dung, soil, stones. It is decorated with plants and sprinkled upon with red (Kanku) and white (Abil) color powder. A small temple-like structure is placed atop. Cows are brought in.





Prabhu's Mukhiyaji (Priest) performs Cow Puja first and then performs Govardhan puja. Mukhiyaji then takes four ritualistic circumambulations around ShriGirirajji. Then, the Vaishnav gathering is permitted to offer flowers petals, Kanku and Abil to ShriGirirajji and take ritualistic circumambulations.

### Annakut Darshan



Annakut Bhog arranged in a very specific order.

Variety of fruits, dry fruits, sweets made with milk and sugar collectively called "Dudhghar" (Penda, Burfi, Halva, Basundi, Shrikhand, Rasgulla, etc) and pickles are arranged closest to ShriNathji Prabhu.

Next arranged are a variety of sweets and baked/fried appetizers made using different types of flour, sugar, jaggery, water, milk, yogurt, etc. These items are collectively called "Anna-Sakhadi" and include Mohanthal, Thor, Boondi Laddoo, Ghughara, Ghari, Tavapuri, Manohar, Lapasi, Manbhog (Shira), Dahivada, Farsipuri, Khaja, Muthia, etc.

Next arranged are a variety of fried dried vegetables, appetizers (Farsan) and Raita (yogurt mixed with cucumber).

Next arranged are food items that are collectively called "Sakhadi". These include cooked vegetables, cereals, lentils, Kadhi and rice.

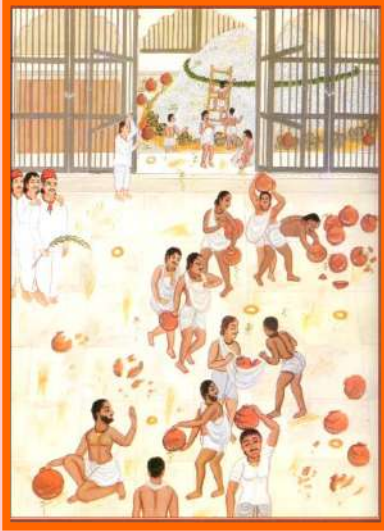
A huge white-cotton-cloth-covered wicker basket is filled with a mound of rice. A necklace made from Tulsi leaves adorns the rice mound. Five huge



"Gunja" (as shown in the pictures below) made from plain wheat flour are placed on the mound as shown.

Annakut is a PushtiBhaktiMarg Yagya where the rice mound symbolizes Yagya-Narayan. The round Gunja placed at the top represents the face of Yagya-Narayan. The four elliptical Gunja on four sides represent four arms of Yagya-Narayan holding conch, discus, mace and lotus.

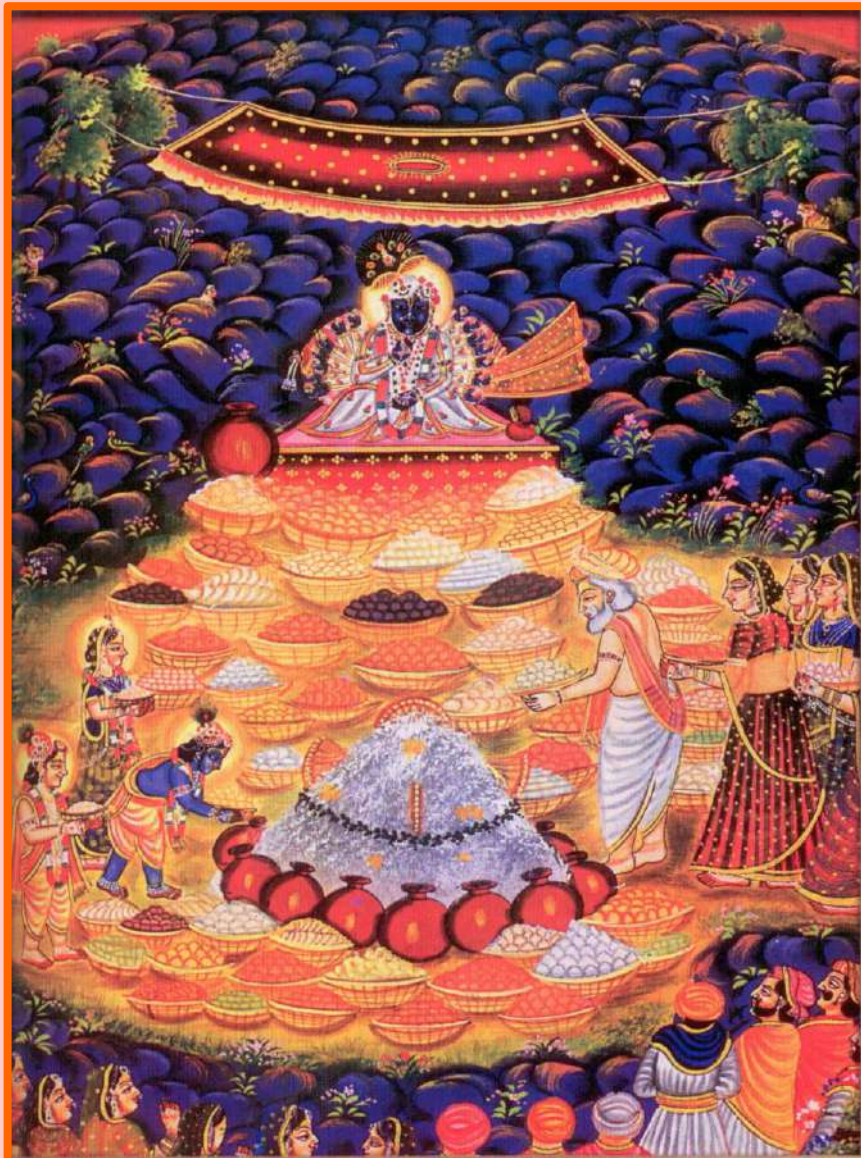




ShriNathji Prabhu is served Annakut Bhog for an average of 90 minutes before Annakut darshan opens for devotees. Annakut Darshan is usually available for multiple hours. Afterwards, Annakut prasad is distributed among the devotees.

ShriNathji Temple of Nathdwara (Rajasthan, Bharat) has a unique tradition.

The tribal people around Nathdwara are invited to raid the Annakut after the Darshan. They usually grab rice which they dry and preserve. They have faith that the dried rice works as a cure-all medicine for them.





## CHAPTER - 31

### Why Do We Need to Gain True Knowledge About Our Religion...?



Normally, a Religion is...

- ❖ A set of beliefs
- ❖ A set of rule-based methods to attain Spirituality and Liberation
- ❖ A set of values to build moral/ethical code-of-conduct

Hinduism uses a Sanskrit word “**Dharm**” that can loosely defined as Religion. Dharm has deeper and wider meaning than what is prescribed by Religion.

Over and above what is defined as Religion, Dharm means the core nature of beings, core nature of all of us. Dharm defines an individual’s basic nature. For example, Sun’s Dharm is to provide light, Water’s Dharm is to provide coolness, Fire’s core nature is to provide heat, human being’s Dharm is to attain Moksha and be with God, etc.

#### **Religion and Spirituality**

Spirituality is a state of mind.

It is a state of realization of the Soul (Self) or the Supreme Soul (God).

It is Self-Realization or God-Realization.

Religion offers one or more methods (processes) to attain Spirituality.

The method (The Path, The Set of Rituals, The Set of Rules) one follows to attain Spirituality becomes one’s Religion.

The one who says that She/he believes in Spirituality and does not believe in Religion – does not know what She/he is talking about!

#### **Religious Philosophy and Ritualistic Practice**

Every religion has two aspects – Philosophy and Rituals.

**Religious Philosophy** is the result of the extreme thought process and strenuous ritualistic practical application of that thought process. Documentation of such Philosophy is called scripture. The one who does these tasks is known as a Prophet, Messiah, Founder-Guru of a religion or a religious tradition of a major religion.

**Ritualistic Practice** is firmly and entirely based on Religious Philosophy. Rituals are created to lead the followers to a logical end to their religious journey following the Philosophy of the Religion. This logical end is usually the spiritual state of mind that ultimately leads one to liberation.

The problem is that over the period, two types of adversity happen with the original set of rituals.

- ❖ Religious followers remember the rituals but forget the logical reasoning behind them. This makes the rituals seem rigid and senseless to the new followers who tend to question them.



- ❖ Overly zealous religious followers keep on adding unnecessary rituals based on their understanding.

These unwarranted situations deteriorate pure and honest religious practice. To avoid such a dire state of a Religion, rituals must never become rigid. They must be subjected to modifications owing to the changing times but without creating any disconnect from the original logical reasoning behind them. In addition, the poorly thought-out and unnecessary rituals must be weeded out from time to time.

These tasks require deep and true knowledge of religious philosophy and the original logical reasoning behind the many rituals.

**This is why one must gain knowledge about one's religion.**

**A question does arise that should one follow religious rituals without knowing the logical reasoning behind them...?**

An interesting story would provide the answer...!

A scholar of Hinduism from India, on a visit to USA, was met by the children who were insisting on having logical explanation of Hindu traditions and rituals before duly observing them.

As a counter, the Scholar asked the children the following question:

Did you ever seek logical explanation

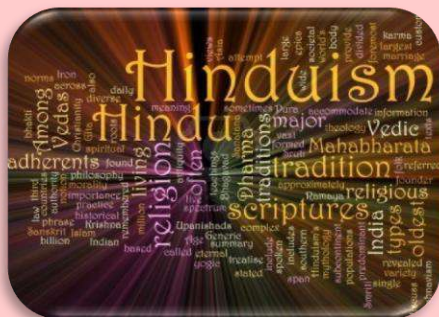
before following a ritual of putting up and decorating a Christmas Tree as part of Christmas celebration...?

OR

before following a ritual of placing-lighting-blowing a candle on a birthday cake or a wedding cake...?

If you have not asked questions for the above, then why you insist upon seeking logical explanation before observing Hindu religious rituals?

The moral of the above story is...Follow the religious rituals and at the same time try to understand them BUT do not insist on understanding them beforehand.



**Pursue Religious knowledge  
While continuing with  
Ritualistic Religious Practice**

## CHAPTER – 32

### Why Do We Need to Take Pride in Being a Hindu / Vaishnav...?

Let us appropriately define three words.

#### Self-esteem (*Sva-Maan*)

It is based on my realistic, un hypocritical evaluation and impression of myself.

“I know who and what I am”.

#### Ego (*Abhi-Maan*)

It is based on my projection of an unrealistic hypocritical impression of self.

“I need others to perceive me this way”.



#### Pride (*Garv*)

Feeling of superiority based on self-esteem or ego.

“I take pride in being a Hindu / Vaishnav”.

Pride would not cause any adverse effect on self if it were based on self-esteem.

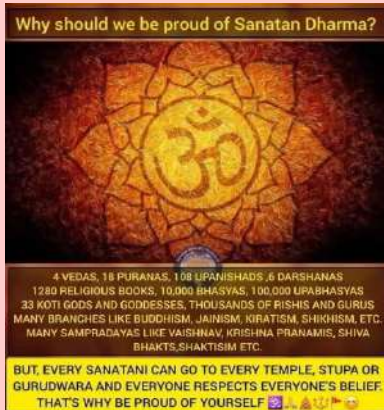
Pride would cause considerable adverse effects on self if it were based on ego.

Self-esteem based Pride has a Sanskrit word – “Garv” (maybe = Dignity).

Ego based Pride has a Sanskrit word – “Ghamand” (maybe = Arrogance).

Taking pride (without being arrogant) into the religious, spiritual, cultural, and social heritage of Hinduism and PushtiBhaktiMarg would...

- ❖ Encourage us to observe moral and ethical values
- ❖ Grant us dignity
- ❖ Increase our self-worth
- ❖ Give our life a profound meaning
- ❖ Sustain our existence as a Hindu / Vaishnav
- ❖ Embolden us to fight the corruption of our values
- ❖ Motivate us to preserve and protect our rich heritage
- ❖ Inspire us to propagate it to our future generations



Such pride is born out of acquiring true knowledge of our religion – Hinduism and PushtiBhaktiMarg and it would encourage us to study our religion more deeply.

We must take pride in our heritage without being arrogant about it and without being disrespectful to the religious-cultural-social heritage of other people.

**Be Proud to Be a Hindu and a Vaishnav.**

## CHAPTER - 33

### Why Do We, as Vaishnavs, Need to Involve in Humanitarian Work ...?



PushtiBhaktiMarg is the Path of selfless Love-Devotion for the Supreme God (ParBrahm, Parmatma) Bhagwan Krishna.

Following the well thought out Pushti rituals of Krishna-Sewa of sanctified Swaroop of ShriKrishna-as-ShriNathji, Vaishnavs lovingly serve Krishna to learn to selflessly love their beloved Krishna.

Alternatively, Vaishnavs can immerse themselves in Krishna-Katha, by way of listening to (Shravan), chanting of (Kirtan), and remembering (Smaran) of the many Leela of Krishna only to learn to selflessly love their beloved Krishna.

Vaishnavs spent their life doing either Krishna-Sewa or Krishna-Katha or both methodically and diligently. Their time is spent directing their love towards the Swaroop of their living God Krishna, they lovingly serve at their homes. Their selfless love remains narrowly focused only and only towards the Swaroop as they are instructed and advised to only think of Krishna's comfort and pleasure.

This is why Vaishnavs can never really expand the horizon of their selfless love to include the people and objects around them. They falsely presume that loving Krishna-Swaroop would be enough to prove their selfless nature of their love. But Bhagwan Krishna's presence is not "limited" to His Swaroop at Vaishnav homes. Krishna resides in every being all around Vaishnavs and everywhere else. Vaishnavs need to practice their selfless love with their family, friends, colleagues and strangers they may come across because that is the only way to expand their selfless love to match the limitless selfless love offered by Bhagwan to His entire creation.

The practical way to expand selfless love is to serve needy human beings, to do humanitarian work, in addition to serving Bhagwan Krishna through Krishna-Sewa or Krishna-Katha. Vaishnavs must be wisely guided by Pushti-Gurus to walk the path of Jan-Sewa (serving needy human beings) along with Krishna-Sewa. Vaishnav Temples must also do humanitarian work on a regular basis.

PushtiBhaktiMarg has a brilliant example in the life of **PujyaShri IndiraBetiji Mahodaya (PujyaJiji)** of Vadodara City who spent her entire life into doing Krishna-Sewa, Krishna-Katha, Jan-Sewa (Humanitarian Work) and preaching/spreading Shrimad VallabhaCharyaji's teachings. She proved that one person can easily perform all these four tasks simultaneously.







## NOTES

## NOTES





**Hasmukh Shah** of Florida (USA) has dedicated his life to Vaishnav education. His life's mission is to create a one single treasure trove of systematically and logically explained mysteries of the religious and spiritual knowledge of Hinduism, PushtiBhaktiMarg, Bhagvad Gita and Shrimad Bhagwat in English for the younger generation of Hindus & Vaishnavs.

**iVaishnav WebApp** is a content-heavy and technologically user-friendly tool that can be comfortably used by predominantly English-speaking young Hindus and Vaishnavs as well as Gujarati- speaking senior population.

iVaishnav WebApp's **Religious Education**, with a maxim of "Learn at the Place, the Time, and the Pace of your choice", will revolutionize the religious learning experience of Vaishnav children, youth, and seniors. It is a work-in-progress and will be available in the first quarter of the year 2025.

Born in 1948, Hasmukh Shah educated himself as a Computer Software Engineer and worked for many years in the Information Technology field in the USA. He volunteered for Vraj Temple of Pennsylvania, Vaishnav Temple of New York and ShriDwarkadhish Temple of New Jersey. He has been volunteering for PujyaPaad Goswami Shri IndiraBetiji Mahodaya (PujyaShri Jiji) and her religious and humanitarian organizations.

Hasmukh Shah is deeply indebted to his parents – Shardaben and Purushottamdas Shah – for sowing the seeds of Pushti-Spirituality in his mind and heart since childhood.

He is forever grateful to PujyaShri Jiji for her blessings and encouragement for his spiritual journey of love-devotion to Bhagwan Krishna.

He is thankful to his compassionate, thoughtful, friendly wife Koki for her active support for his incessant pursuit of spiritual knowledge and his life's mission.

He is much appreciative of moral and financial support from his two sons and their beloved wives – Kunal Shah & Dr. Monika Srivastava and Aalap Shah & Kelly Chew.

His five grandchildren – Aarian, Maya, Sonia, Olivia, Zoe – are his inspiration to invest considerable time and effort into developing religious and spiritual educational courses for the children around the world.

Hasmukh Shah remains obliged to his family and supportive friends forever.



*Don't Just Know, Believe  
Don't Just Believe, Practice  
Brought to the Vaishnav Community  
by Hasmukh Shah (Florida, USA)*



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