



Bhakti Bharat
JOURNEY WITHIN

FESTIVAL OF LIGHTS

Diwali Journey
with Swami Chidananda

October 25 - November 3, 2024



The programme is subject to change due to weather, road conditions or other unforeseen circumstances. The start time of the programme events is approximate.



Bhakti Bharat
JOURNEY WITHIN

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GUIDE

Swami Chidananda is a spiritual educator and monk initiated in the Hari Bhakta Lineage, holding the distinguished title of Swami. With guidance from his Teacher, Paramahansa Vishwananda, and the study of scriptures such as the Bhagavad Gita and the Yoga Sutras of Patanjali, Swami has gained a deep understanding of the science of Yoga and has devoted his life to helping others on their inner journey.

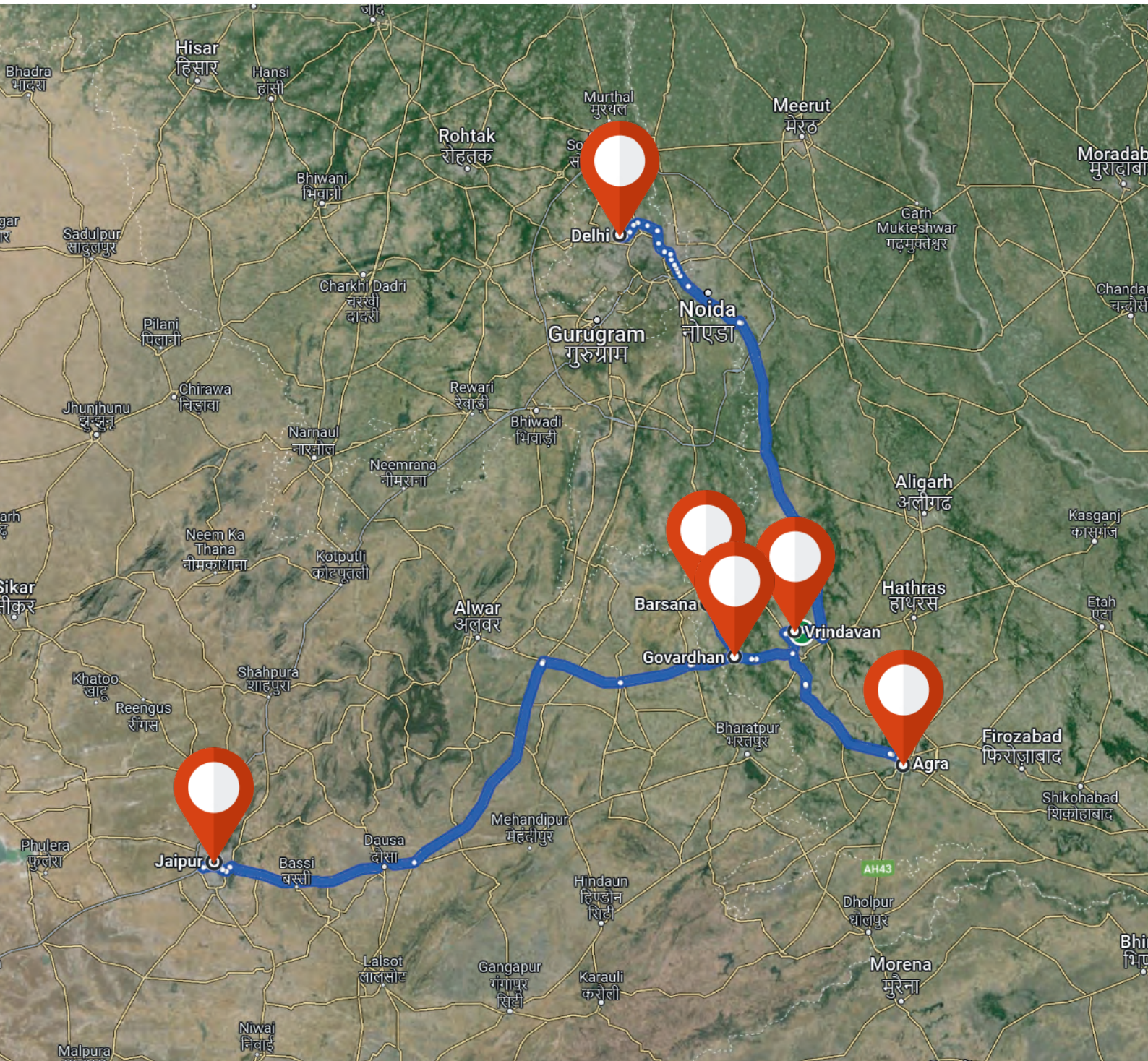
Before entering the spiritual path, he had a successful career as an investment banker and entrepreneur. Now, he uses his experiences to convey the ancient Yoga Systems in a relatable and accessible way





ROUTE

Delhi - Vrindavan - Jaipur - Agra - Barsana - Govardhan - Delhi





BRIEFLY ABOUT OUR JOURNEY

DAY 1

October 25,
Friday

Arrival to Vrindavan

DAY 2

October 26,
Saturday

Visit a few of Guruji's favorite temples and Bhandiravan. Visit the saints in Vamshi Vat. Satsang on the Bhagavad Gita with Swami Chidananda

DAY 3

October 27,
Sunday

Travel to Jaipur, the famous 'Pink' city in Rajasthan. Visit to Sri Gopinath Mandir and other legendary temples of Jaipur.



DAY 4

**October 28,
Monday**

Visit beautiful Sri Galta Pith Temple Complex and Jagat Shiromani Temple.

DAY 5

**October 29,
Tuesday**

Back to Vrindavan. Visit a few temples.

DAY 6

**October 30,
Wednesday**

Journey to Agra to visit the Taj Mahal, the most beautiful royal tomb in India. Dantheras celebration at Shree Giridhar Dham.



DAY 7

October 31,
Thursday

Parikrama around Vrindavan, on the way visit famous temples and places where Krishna's lilas took place. Visit to Barsana, the place where Srimati Radharani grew up, and temples with self-manifested deities.

DAY 8

November 1,
Friday

Parikrama around Govardhan. Satsang on the Bhagavad Gita with Swami Chidananda. Om-Chanting. Celebration of Diwali at Shree Giridhar Dham, Lakshmi Puja, fireworks.



DAY 9
November 2,
Saturday

Celebration of Govardhana Puja.
Yamuna boat trip and evening
arati of Yamuna-devi

DAY 10
November 3,
Sunday

Farewell meeting. Free day.



TRAVEL PROGRAMME





DAY 1

October 25, Friday

Arrival to Vrindavan

VRAJ

Vraj-mandala is a historical place in the Northern part of India, Uttar Pradesh, where Sri Krishna played His lilas five thousand years ago. In Vraj He was born, grew up, played with His friends and grazed cows. Here He killed the demons and met with His beloved Radha, danced the Rasa Dance and has been a true friend for the village cowherd boys. And He walked all around Vraj. Vraj consists of several towns, many small villages, forests and sand lands. The central part of the mandala consists of the places of the great Rasa-lila of the Lord.





VRINDAVAN

'Think of Vrindavan with great devotion, roll in the dust of Vrindavan, use your body in service of Vrindavan, develop ardent love for Vrindavan, try to please moving and nonmoving inhabitants of Vrindavan. Worship the birthplace of Sri Radha and with all your heart take refuge in Vrindavan - the best of holy places.'

Sri Vrindavana Mahimamrita





DAY 2

October 26, Saturday

Visit a few of Guruji's favorite temples and Bhandiravan.
Visit the saints in Vamshi Vat.
Satsang on the Bhagavad Gita with Swami Chidananda

Bhandirvan

Bhandirvan is one of the 12 forests of Vrindavan. It was in Bhandirvan that Radharani and Krishna got married. However, it was not an ordinary worldly marriage that you see nowadays. This marriage was arranged by yogamaya herself, which is the Lord's Divine illusory power. Lord Brahma acted here as a priest, and only 10 million trustful friends of Radha and Krishna (including sakhas, peacocks, parrots, cows and monkeys) were allowed to be present. Moreover, only these 10 million to whom Radharani and Krishna had given such grace can enter Bhandirvan at present.





Vamshi Vat

Vamshi Vat is a unique place in Vraj, where about 40 saints live in simple huts in the middle of the forest.





Devaraha Baba Ashram

One of the great Masters of India was Devraha Baba. He lived an incredibly long and ascetic life, did not eat anything for years and sat on a high wooden platform called mancha on the banks of the Yamuna. Now there is Devraha Baba's Ashram there. The mancha where Baba sat is still preserved.

Baba did not allow people to touch him as his energy was so strong that it could kill. However, sometimes he would lower his foot from the mancha and place it on the head of a devotee, blessing him/her. Many famous personalities, including politicians, came to him for blessings. Many people from all walks of life flocked to Baba.

Once during their conversation, Devraha said to Mahatma Gandhi: 'Don't go to Delhi.' The latter responded: 'I can't. There will be a big rally there, and thousands of people are waiting for me.' 'Then take a blanket,' with these words, Devraha Baba threw his old blanket to Gandhi. He carried this blanket with him, but before the speech, he forgot it in the car. That was the day Gandhi was shot.

Baba loved going to the Yamuna. He often disappeared underwater for several hours; sometimes people saw him walking on water. Baba used to say that he was the child of Yamuna. Baba fed on milk and the water from the river. Sometimes Devraha went to the Himalayas and did not allow anyone to follow him further than Rishikesh. No one knew where he would go after that. During the Kumbh Mela, the yogi was seen in different places at the same time.

The life of Devraha Baba is shrouded in mystery, and according to different versions, the duration of his life varies up to 2,200 years, of which at least 200 years he lived in Vrindavan. Baba is one of the greatest yogis in the history of India, who took initiation from Sri Ramanujacharya.



Baba left his body quite recently, on 19 June 1990. When Baba left his body, the top of his skull flew off - this happens to powerful yogis when their prana leaves the body through the crown chakra. Devraha Baba's body was placed in a wooden cage, which was put into the Yamuna. A few hours later they pulled the cage up, and it was empty. Before leaving, he said: 'Without a physical body, I can help you even more.'



Radha Raman Temple & Gopal Bhatta Goswami Samadhi





Sri Radha Raman Temple is dedicated to Radha Krishna, and this is one of the favorite temples of Vrindavan devotees. If Banke Bihari means 'one who enjoys', the name Radha Raman means 'one who gives pleasure to Radha'. The deity of Radha Raman is Svayambhu, or Sri Radha Raman self-manifested one. On Chaitanya Mahaprabhu's instructions, Gopal Bhatta Goswami went to the Kali Gandaki River in Nepal. There, he found 12 Shaligrams, the physical manifestation of Lord Narayana, but on his way back to Vrindavan, he realised that he was not worthy of serving the Shaligrams and again went to the Kali-Gandaki Valley to return them back.

As soon as Gopal Bhatta Goswami wanted to release them into the river, the Shaligrams were jumping back into his hands. Recognizing God's will, he brought the Shaligrams back to Vrindavan, where he began to worship and serve them with deep devotion. Still, his desire to worship the Divine form of the Lord, an image that could be fed, touch and dressed, grew stronger and stronger as the years passed. So, one morning, Gopala Bhatta Goswami found that the basket where the Shaligrams normally rested was open. Looking inside, he discovered that eleven Shaligrams were in their original form, and the twelfth one turned into a beautiful black murti of Radha Krishna.

Sri Radha Raman appearance place is in the Radha Raman Temple, next to the samadhi of Gopala Bhatta. Gopal Bhatta Goswami's other Shaligram-shilas are also worshiped on the altar here. RadhaRaman is one of the few original deities of the Goswamis which are still in Vrindavan. Although there is no deity of Radha in this temple, the name of Radharani is worshiped in this temple. There is a golden plate next to Krishna, which has the name of Radharani engraved into it. Gopal Bhatta Goswami was one of the six Goswamis of Vrindavan, the closest disciples of Chaitanya Mahaprabhu, but he always maintained meekness and humility. Chaitanya Mahaprabhu loved him so much that he gave him his own belt, a kaupina (cloth) and asana (seat) that he used. This relics are still present in the temple and are brought out to be seen by the public for six days a year.

Srila Gopal Bhatta Goswami left his body in 1585 (according to other sources in 1578). His samadhi is located behind the Radha Raman Temple.



The Prince of Vrindavan



Banke Bihari Temple is one of the most visited and most famous temples in India. It is a symbol of unwavering faith and devotion to the beloved Lord. Every day thousands of devotees come to worship Sri Banke Bihariji. In Vrindavan, lots of people go to Banke Bihari daily, because receiving His darshan is priceless. Banke Bihari means "bent in three places enjoying". The deity Banke Bihari is Swayambhu which means that the deity was self-manifested. Half a millennium ago, Saint Swami Haridas received the darshan of Radha and Krishna in Their one form in Nidhivan and prayed to Them that every person on this earth who does not have divine vision should be able to receive Their darshan. Thus Banke Bihari, the one form of Radha and Krishna, revealed Himself to His devotees.

Swami Haridas

Swami Haridas was born in a small village, now known as Haridaspur, near Aligarh in Uttar Pradesh. The lineage of the family can be traced back to Shri Gargacharya. Shri Gargacharya was the Kulaguru (family guru) of Yadavas and visited Braj secretly for conducting the Namakarana Samskara (naming ceremony) of young Krishna and Balarama on request of Vasudeva. Swami Haridas was the reincarnation of Lalita Sakhi, of the inner consortium of Lord Krishna. This easily explains the fact that even in his childhood, he was more into meditation and scriptures, while other children of his age were busy playing.

He was married at the suitable age according to the time to Harimati. Even after his marriage, young Haridas stayed away from worldly pleasures and concentrated on meditation. Hari mataji was such a saintly soul herself that on realizing the inclination of her husband, she prayed intensely and was bodily transported to the heavenly abode of Lord by entering the flame of a small lamp in the presence of Swami Haridas. No physical remains were left behind. Soon after that Haridas left his village for Vrindavan, which was a dense forest at that time and chose a secluded spot, which is now known as Nidhivan, to practice his music and to enjoy the eternal bliss of meditation.



Initially, the deity of Banke Bihari was installed in a temple close to the first appearance in Nidhivan. A new temple befitting the glory of Bihariji was constructed in 1862.

The Divine presence in the Bihariji's temple can be felt very intensely, and it is never quiet here: the place is always full of people singing and shouting His Name. There are several amazing stories associated with Banke Bihari.

One of the stories says...

that around five centuries ago there was a Rajput princess who came to see Him. She fell so much in love with Bihariji that she could not take her eyes off Him all day.

When the temple was about to close, she went to her palanquin where to her surprise she discovered the murti of Banke Bihari. He was so captivated by her love that He did not want to be away from her, so He left with the princess. Everyone was looking for Him, but Bihariji was nowhere to be found... Coming back home, of course, the princess sent a letter to Vrindavan and informed the temple that Bihariji was staying with her. The deity was returned to Vrindavan, but since then there had been a tradition in the temple that every few seconds the curtains separating the deity from the public are closed and opened every few seconds, so that no one can look continuously into His eyes. You never know where you have to go to look for Bihariji next time, and whether He will want to return at all... It is forbidden to take photographs of Banke Bihari, but they say that a few years ago a devotee, after sincere prayers, got permission to take photographs of Bihariji. Thanks to that devotee others now have the opportunity to admire Sri Banke Bihari as well.





Another Story Related to Bihariji's Disappearance during the Night

One night, a pujari was pulling the strings of a hand fan so that it wouldn't be too hot for Bihariji to sleep. Without realising it, he fell asleep. When he woke up, he wanted to check if Bihariji was sleeping soundly but to his surprise, Bihariji wasn't there!

It was a late night but the pujari couldn't sleep anymore. He was waiting for Bhagavan's return. At 4 a.m. he saw Bihariji getting back with a sweaty, flushed face. The next night the pujari saw Banke Bihariji leaving at midnight. He decided to follow the Lord and found Him entering Nidhivan. Following that, the sounds of a flute and dancing filled the air, and at 4 a.m. Bihariji returned to the temple again.

Now the pujari knew that Bhagavan was not getting much rest during the night, so when another pujari came early in the morning to wake the Lord up for mangala-arati, he stopped him, saying that the Lord had not had enough sleep due to His overnight visit to Radha and the gopis in Nidhivan. From that moment, the time of the first arati was changed to 8:30 a.m., so that Banke Bihari would have enough time to rest.



There is a third story that Gurudev told in His book.

Paramahansa Vishwananda
«Just Love: a journey into the Heart of God»
pages: 363-370

'Banke Bihari Bears Witness.

In Vrindavan there was a mataji by the name of Natyabai. She was always sitting in the corner of the street in Vrindavan and she was always giving water to people. That was her seva. That was her bhajana. That was her yajna, her sacrifice, and she was doing it with full love and devotion. Every day she was there for the people. One day somebody asked her, 'Please, tell me: why do you do that?'

Then she started relating her story of how the Lord Himself had come to her father. Her father was a school teacher. They were not rich. They didn't have much money. They were very average people. It so happened that his eldest daughter, mataji Natyabai, was going to get married. In India the custom is that you have to give a lot of dowry and prepare a big festival, because a marriage is not something small in India. However, they didn't have much money. The father didn't have much and the mother didn't have much either. So, he went around asking his friends, 'Please, help me! I want to marry my daughter, but I don't have enough means.' Everybody said, 'no', because they knew that he was poor. Even if he said, 'With time I will return your money to you.' Everybody refused him. And they all found a hundred excuses for not lending him the money. These so-called friends, who would sit and chat with him every day, when the time came to help him nobody was there for him. When he returned home he was in such a depressed state that his wife said, 'Don't worry. We don't need to marry our daughter now.'

In all the villages they have a munimji. The munimji, the money lender, of that place used to lend money, but in a very crooked way. He always ruined people and everybody in the village knew him. Everybody who had gone through his hands had lost out and had more worries and more problems and debts afterwards.



However, the only solution for Natyabai's father, if he wanted to marry his daughter, was to go to this man. So, he went to the munimji and, of course, the man welcomed him nicely, 'Come, headmaster! Take a seat.' He asked the munimji, 'Please, I need money for my daughter's wedding.' He was in a depressed state.

The munimji was very cunning. He prepared a paper saying, 'Yes, you will return this money to me in two years' time, otherwise we will take your whole property.' He said, 'Okay, I will try. If God wills it, we'll return it.' He was very adamant about it, that he would return it in two years. The munimji gave him the money and then he returned home. On that day he was very joyful when coming home. His wife was looking and said, 'Why are you so happy?' 'Well, I'm very happy because our daughter will get married.'

Everything was prepared. The daughter got married in a very grandiose way and he gave the dowry. And then, like promised to the munimji, he paid back the money every month. He worked very hard and returned the money. In the Hindu tradition, in North India, after the daughter gets married, the parents always make a promise. The father and mother had made a promise that if their daughter got married, they would go to Char Dham. As promised, when he finished returning all the money, he went to the munimji and said, 'I have returned everything to you.' And the munimji welcomed him very nicely saying, 'Yes, of course. You have returned everything. Here, sign.' He signed the paper that he had returned the money. The munimji said, 'I will send you the paper by post.' He trusted him so much that he said, 'Well, fine. No problem. We will not be here for a month.'

So, husband and wife went on the pilgrimage and when they came back after a month, the man got a letter from the court that he had to present himself in the court of Delhi because he had borrowed some money and had not returned it by the due date. He was shocked and said, 'But, I did give all the money back. I did return all the money. Why did they send me this letter?' He was very nervous and went to the munimji's place.



When he arrived there, the munimji welcomed him and said, 'Ah you came back.' Then the headmaster said, 'Listen, I returned the money to you and you told me that you would send me the signed paper. But look, I received this letter from the court.'

At that moment, the munimji became very angry and started saying, 'We will see you in court because you have not returned the money.' He was lying and had changed completely saying, 'If you don't return the money to me, I will confiscate your house. I will take everything from you.' Upon hearing this, the man became depressed, very hurt. He came home and told his wife about it. His wife said, 'I told you. You should not have gone to such a cunning man.'

The headmaster was in a very depressed state. He went to all his friends and said to them, 'You know that I have returned all the money to him and have not returned it. He is lying. What shall I do? Please, bear witness for me for that, because I have to go to the court. Who will bear witness for me?' The friends said, 'No. We told you not to go there. We told you not to borrow money from that man and not to engage yourself with him.' All the friends denied him; they refused to help him. They all left him completely alone. He was so depressed that he said he would go and kill himself.

In such a depressed state he didn't know what to do. He started walking like mad, absent-minded, and didn't know where he going. So, he arrived on the main road that links Delhi to Agra. He was walking like a madman without looking left or right. At that moment there was a bus coming. He was crossing the road. The bus stopped. Of course, everybody was looking at what was wrong with this man, why was he walking on a busy road like that. He didn't say anything to anybody. He just went onto the bus not saying anything to anyone. The bus driver was one of his students. When the bus driver was a child, this man used to be his teacher. So, the bus driver recognised him and started talking with him saying, 'Ah, you are the headmaster.' He replied, 'Yes, I am.' Then the driver started conversing with him and said, 'I was your student. I studied under you when I was small and now I'm a bus driver.'



Then, the driver asked him, 'Where are you going?' The headmaster said, 'I don't know where I'm going. Anywhere.' At that moment the driver realised that there was a problem. That's why the headmaster had been walking so absent mindedly. So, he started asking him questions.

The headmaster started to tell him what had happened and the driver was very touched. So he started talking about Krishna and telling him about the glory of Lord Krishna. Of course, the headmaster knew about Krishna. Everybody in India knows about Krishna, but the headmaster hadn't shown much interest in Him before. So, here, the driver started telling him his experiences with the Lord.

The driver left the headmaster in Vrindavan and explained to him how to get to Banke Bilhari Temple: 'Ask anybody, they will show you.' So, he went to the temple and he sat down. When he looked at Krishna, he was filled with peace and love. He was filled with this tremendous calmness inside him. First he was agitated and was very overwhelmed, and also depressed, but all of a sudden all of that disappeared. At that moment he had a deep realisation that everything would be okay, that everything would be fine. He sat there for hours and hours. It started to get dark, and suddenly he realised he had to go home. Before going home, he said, 'I will take a dip in the Yamuna.' So, he went to the Yamuna River, took a dip in it and came out. With all his clothes wet he walked back to the bus station and took the bus back to his place. When he was back at home, arriving late at night, he was constantly chanting the Name of Krishna. All the time he was singing the Name of Krishna, and he was joyful, he was blissful. When his wife saw him, she said, 'My husband has gone mad. Due to that deep depression, deep worries, because he didn't know how to pay. I'm sure he has gone mad... he is finished.' But, that night he slept so well, without any worries.

The next morning, he went to the court of Delhi, and he felt very light. He went alone. In the court they showed him a paper and asked him, 'Did you sign this?' He replied, 'Yes, I signed it.' Then, the judge said, 'This munimji said that he lent you money, but you have not returned it.'



The headmaster said, 'No, I have returned the money to him.' And he told the whole story, and how the munimji had said to him that he would send the paper to him by mail. Of course, the judge knew what these munimjis were like, but he had just the document that this man had signed when the munimji lent him the money. So, the judge continued, 'This munimji has the paper to prove that you have taken this money from him. When you return the money, you have to sign a document.' Then, the man said, 'Yes, I signed that paper that I have returned all the money. He himself also signed the paper and he said that he would send me a copy of that signed paper, but he has not sent that copy to me yet.'

Of course, the judge knew inside himself that what the headmaster was saying was true. But, according to the law you need proof. The headmaster was standing in the court and the judge asked him, 'Do you have any proof, anyone to bear witness to what you are saying to me?' At that moment he was taken with so much bhava inside him. He closed his eyes and he saw Banke Bihari. He saw the image of Banke Bihari and said, 'Yes, I have. Banke Bihari is my witness.'

Of course, the Lord is a witness of everything. So, when he said that, of course, everybody started laughing. The judge had to ask the question, 'What is the address of Banke Bihari?' He replied, 'The address is Banke Bihari Mandir, Vrindavan, Uttar Pradesh.' When he gave this address, of course, everybody was making fun of him, because Banke Bihari is just a deity there. At that moment, the munimji was relieved, 'No witness. He's gone mad.'

So, the court was adjourned for five days. He went home waiting for the five days to pass. Meanwhile, the court had to send a letter to tell Mr. Banke Bihari to come and to be a witness. They wrote a nice letter and sent the clerk of the court to go and deliver the letter to Mr. Banke Bihari. The clerk took the train from Delhi to Mathura. In Mathura he took a taxi to Vrindavan. In Vrindavan, when he got out of the taxi, he started looking for the address. A small boy, dark in colour, approached him and said, 'Come, I will show you!' He took the hand of the man and pulled him to the temple of Banke Bihari.



When he was in front of the temple, the temple was closed. Then the man said, 'Well, it's closed. How can I go inside to give Mr. Banke Bihari the letter from the court telling Him to show up as a witness?' Then the little boy said, 'Listen, Banke Bihari is resting right now. Nobody can go inside. Stick it on this door there! When Banke Bihari gets up, He will read you letter.' The man didn't know what to do. Finally, he said, 'Okay.' He stuck the letter on the door and left. Meanwhile, the little boy had disappeared.

On the fourth day the headmaster went to Vrindavan. He knew that the witness he was referring to was Krishna and He is the only eternal witness of all. He only had Him as a witness, nobody else. He said, 'Now, for sure I'm in deep trouble.' So, he went to Banke Bihari Temple, had darshan of Banke Bihari and sat there. As time passed he fell asleep. He was worried, thinking, 'Who will come and bear witness for me in the court?' While he was sleeping, he had a dream. In that dream Banke Bihari appeared to him and said, 'Listen my dear, you have come into My shelter. You have come to My place and asked Me for something. I can't refuse you. I will come. I will bear witness for you.'

At that moment he woke up. He woke up with so much love and bhava that he started singing and dancing, crazy for Krishna. He was so full with this bhava that he went back home joyfully. His wife saw him again and said, 'This time he's had it. My husband is finished!'

The next day he went to Delhi. The munimji and all the others were there: the judge, the lawyers... And he was standing there but didn't have anybody with him. So, they asked him, 'Have you brought the witness?' He kept quiet and didn't say anything. Of course, the munimji was sure that nobody would come. So, the headmaster closed his eyes, and looked down not knowing what to do nor what to say.

They called the name of the witness, 'Mr. Banke Bihari!' One time, nothing! Second time, nothing! Third time, silence. And then, all of a sudden, in the deep silence behind the door they heard a voice saying, 'Yes, I'm here!'



At that moment everybody turned around. The door opened and everybody turned to look at Mr. Banke Bihari. When the door opened, a small boy came in. He was completely covered, even his head was covered with a black shawl. His head was down, and he was walking barefoot. He came in front of the judge and stood there.

Of course, everybody was curious to know who this boy was, who was this person. At that moment the little boy started telling everything in perfect detail, every single thing that had happened and he revealed where the crooked munimji had hidden the original signed document. At that moment the munimji's heart was beating so badly, because he knew that nobody else knew about this document. How come this small boy knew in perfect detail about everything? The judge asked the munimji and the munimji could not lie, so he said the truth.

They all wanted to know who this Mr. Banke Bihari was. Even the judge wanted to know who was in front of him, because when He came in, everyone felt so much brightness and Love in the courtroom that they had never felt before. Of course, they could not see His face, because He had covered Himself. However, the headmaster knew that whoever was standing there was not a normal person.

It was Krishna Himself, as He had promised him. The judge wanted to see who He was, so he started asking, 'Who are you?' The boy didn't say anything. Then, he continued asking, 'Please, let me see you! Let me just see your face.'

At that moment, the little boy just opened up the shawl in a way that only the judge could see His face. The judge had a pen in his hand and was writing. At that moment, when he looked at the boy's face, he was face to face with Krishna. His pen just fell down and he was completely emotional and taken aback. He didn't know what to do. At that moment, the little boy just disappeared leaving the black shawl on the floor.



And, of course, this incident had also a great impact on the people in the court itself. On that day, the judge resigned from his job, renounced everything and went to live in Vrindavan. People started calling him 'Judge Baba'. On that day, the headmaster also didn't return home and went to live in Vrindavan. And, of course, also his daughter. It was his daughter herself who told this story.

You see, if one is surrendered to Bhagavan, Bhagavan Himself is also surrendered to the bhakta.'





Sri Radha Vallabh Temple

The Radha Vallabh Temple is a symbol of the pure love between Lord Krishna and Radha, who is the embodiment of the Rasa-bhakti ideal. Even though Radharani is the main revered deity here, throughout the entire temple, one cannot find a single murti of Radharani being separate from Krishna. Radha Vallabh is a Svayambhu, a self-manifested deity. It is Radha and Krishna in Their united form.

Next to the deity on the altar is a crown which represents Radha Herself, the highest form of bhakti, and only he who has a devotion to the Lord and purity in his heart can receive the darshan (blessings) of Radharani. Sundardas Bhatnagar built the temple during the reign of Emperor Akbar the Great, in the late 16th century, on the money given by the emperor himself.



Sundardas Bhatnagar had also got permission from Akbar to use red sandstone for the construction of the temple, which, at that time, was only used for the construction of imperial buildings, royal palaces, and fortresses. The descendants of Sundardas Bhatnagar are still the caretakers of the temple. King Man Singh, the most trusted general of the Mughal Emperor Akbar, was the first who wanted to build this temple. However, when he heard the legend that whoever did so would die within a year, he refused. What the legend said became true in the end: Sundardas Bhatnagar, who built the temple, died within a year of its completion of the temple.

DAY 3

October 27, Sunday

Travel to Jaipur, the famous 'Pink' city in Rajasthan. Visit to Sri Gopinath Mandir and other legendary temples of Jaipur.





JAIPUR

Jaipur is one of the most beautiful and culturally rich cities in India. It was founded by Maharaja Sawai Jai Singh II in November 1727, which is quite recent for India. Located in the North of India, Jaipur is the capital of the Rajasthan state and its largest city.

Jaipur is famous for its architecture. The city was planned and built according to the Vastu rules. For instance, the directions of all streets and markets in Jaipur are east to west and north to south. The city was built in the form of an eight-part mandala known as the Pithapada. The buildings were built from rare pink sandstone; that is why Jaipur is called the Pink City.



The Three Murtis of Lord Krishna

About 5,000 years ago, Lord Krishna's great-grandson Brajranabh wanted to make an exact replica of the Lord, his great-grandfather. After receiving proper instructions from his grandmother Uttara, the mother of Parikshit, about His likeness, the young 13-year-old boy set to work.

- The first murti he made had only the lower part of the body like Lord Krishna. And this first murti was named Madan Mohan.
- Brajranabh made the second murti, but that too did not turn out to be completely Krishna-like, but only the chest. The Lord in this form is called Gopinath.
- Then Brajranabh made the third murti, looking at which Uttara blushed and said that this is how Lord Krishna looked! Krishna in this form became known as Govind Dev Ji.

All three murtis were originally installed in Vrindavan. But as the centuries passed, the glory of Vrindavan was almost forgotten. By the XVI century, the city was overgrown with dense forest, and with that, all three murtis were lost. The appearance of Sri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu in the early XVI century led to the restoration of the holy place, and one way or another, the murtis were again revealed to Chaitanya's devotees. Later, during the Mughal expansion, in the XVII century, they were taken out of Vrindavan by the Rajputs.

We will visit Gopinath and Govind Dev Ji, which are located in Jaipur. Whereas Madan Mohan Ji is now being served in Karauli, Rajasthan.



Govind Dev ji Temple

The original murti of Govind Dev ji was hidden in Vrindavan for a long time. About 500 years ago, Sri Rupa Goswami with Sanatana Goswami, following the instruction of Chaitanya Mahaprabhu, set out to rebuild Vrindavan. And in 1525, on the Vasanta Panchami day, Govind Dev ji Himself appeared in front of Rupa Goswami.

At the end of the XVI century, King Amera Sawai Man Singh along with Akbar, the Great Mughal Emperor, built a large temple in Vrindavan. But later on, the Mughal ruler Aurangzeb started destroying Hindu temples and murtis. So, in 1714, Govind Dev ji was taken away by Sawai Jai Singh, the ruler of Amer.

Once, Maharaj had a dream in which Lord Krishna told him to take His deity away from Vrindavan and install it in his residence. For some time the location of the murti was kept secret because Amer had diplomatic relations with the Mughals. But then, in 1735, Govind ji was brought from Amer to Jaipur and installed in Surya Mahal (or Suraj Mahal).

Surya Mahal was the residence of Sawai Jai Singh at that time but he gave this magnificent palace to Govind Dev ji and moved to Chandra Mahal located nearby. Chandra Mahal was built in such a way that Govind Dev ji could be seen from its windows, and Sawai Jai Singh could receive His darshan directly from his residence. Later on, the Surya Mahal was renamed as the Radha Govind Dev ji Temple.



Radha Gopinath Temple

One day Krishna was sitting on a branch of a banyan tree, playing His flute, and calling Radha and the gopis to join Him in the Rasa dance – the sweetest of all His transcendental pastimes....

Gopinath is an unbelievably sweet form of Krishna. The deity of Gopinath, the Lord of all gopis, was originally established in Vamshivat, Vrindavan, by the great-grandson of Lord Krishna. 'Vamshi' means 'flute' and 'vat' means 'banyan tree'. The temple officials fearing Muslim raids buried Gopinath in the roots of the very same banyan tree. In 1502, during a flood, the water current eroded the soil around that tree, breaking it and carrying it away.

In Vrindavan, there lived a saint named Madhu Pandit. At that moment, during the flood, he was in Vamshivat singing bhajans to Radha Krishna. Having seen the tree being taken away by the current, Madhu Pandit rushed after it and managed to break off one branch. He got back to plant that branch and discovered the murti of Gopinath in place of the tree that had been taken away by the current. The branch that he planted grew into the banyan tree, that is still there today.

Nowadays the deity of Gopinath is located in Jaipur. He was taken from Vrindavan to Radha Kund in 1669 and then to Jaipur in 1775. The sacred pearl garment usually worn by Sri Madhu Pandit was also taken to Jaipur and is now displayed in a temple room.

Radha Vinoda Temple

The deities of Radha and Krishna located here were personally served by Srila Lokanath Goswami, one of the closest companions of Lord Chaitanya.

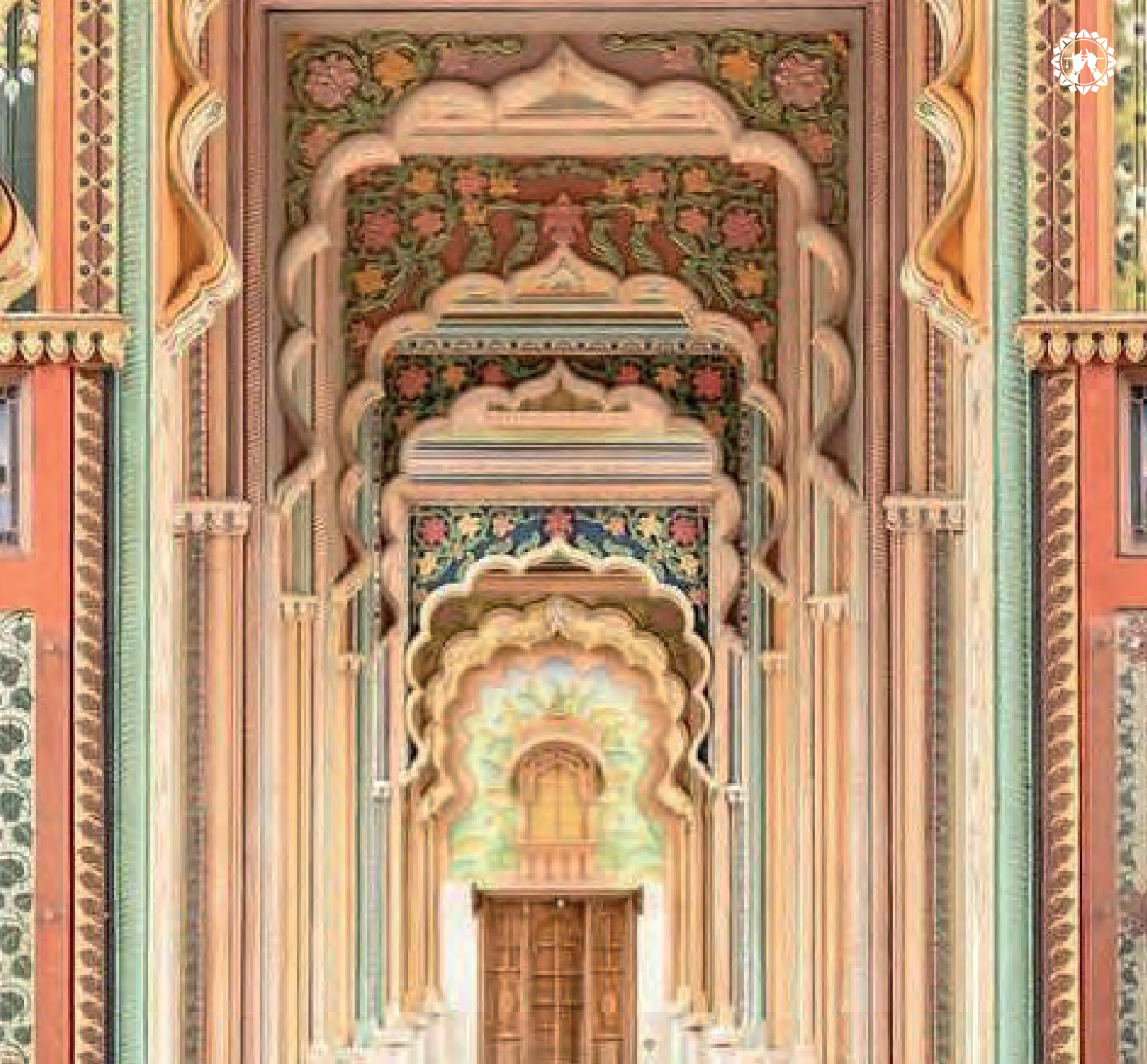


Lokanath Goswami was among those whom Chaitanya Mahaprabhu sent to rebuild Vrindavan. Almost all of them had their own Radha Krishna deities, but not Lokanath Goswami. He wanted so much to serve his deities, and this desire grew stronger and stronger.

One day a brahmana came to him, gave him a pouch, and disappeared right away. Lokanatha Goswami opened the pouch and saw the deity of Vinoda.

Lokanatha Goswami built a hut at Keshi Ghat - this was the first temple for Sri Vinodaji. Later a large temple was built, but in 1670 Aurangzeb's army attacked Vrindavan. Radha Vinoda and some other deities were taken to Jaipur, where Raja Sawai Jai Singh built large temples for them.





DAY 4

October 28, Monday

Visit beautiful Sri Galta Pith Temple Complex and Jagat Shiromani Temple.



Jagat Shiromani Temple

Jagat Shiromani Temple in Amer (now part of Jaipur city) is one of the major temples of the state of Rajasthan. It is a famous place of veneration of Lord Krishna and His great devotee Mirabai.

The murti of Lord Krishna installed here is the murti worshipped by Mirabai when she was still married. During the Mughal expansion, this murti was transported from Chittor, where Mirabai often stayed with her husband and her Krishna. Raja Man Singh, the head of Akbar's armed forces and a Hindu by birth, preserved the murti after the conquest of Chittor and brought it to Amer. The temple was built in the XVI-XVII centuries by Queen Kankawati, the wife of Raja Man Singh, in memory of their deceased son Jagat Singh. It is one of the oldest temples of Jaipur – it is of the same age as the city itself.

This temple is located near Amer Fort, on the outskirts of Jaipur. It is also famous for its architecture and exquisite decoration. The main entrance gate is visible from the main road of Amer, while the second gate is connected to the staircase of the palace and leads to the open courtyard of the temple.



At the entrance of the temple, there is a beautiful marble torana (a pillar) flanked by elephant statues. This torana has been carved from a single piece of marble and has beautiful bas-reliefs of the celestial beings adorning it. The murti of Lord Vishnu in this temple is also carved out of white marble.

On the main altar of the temple, we can see the murti of Mirabai being placed next to her Krishna.





Galtaji Temple

The Galtaji Temple complex is located 10 km away from Jaipur. Surrounded by picturesque Aravalli Hills and rich greenery, it includes several temples, pavilions and a cascade of kunds. The Galtaji Temple was built from pink sandstone and decorated with paintings, round huts and columns; it looks more like a magnificent palace than a traditional temple. Here, the temples of Lord Rama, Lord Krishna, Brahma, Vishnu and Hanuman are located. On top of the hill, there is a temple dedicated to Surya-deva, with an outstanding view of Jaipur and the adjacent valley.

Natural springs that originate high on the hill, flow down filling seven kunds, one after another, the main of which, Galta Kund, never goes dry. Clean clear water flows from Gaumukh, a rock in the form of a cow's head.

The temple complex is also famous for the huge population of monkeys that live there; that is why this place is sometimes called the 'Monkey Temple' or 'Galvar Bagh'.

The history of Galta Ji Temple originates from the Satya-yuga times and is connected with Saint Galtav, who lived there and practised tapasya. Pleased by his tapasya, the Lord appeared before Galtav and blessed that place with a plenitude of water, sending the waters of the Ganges there. The Galta Ji Temple complex was named after that saint. Much later, Saint Tulsidas spent three years there writing several parts of 'Sundar Kand' of the Ramacharitamanas epos.



There is a murti of Sri Ram Gopal in the Sri Sitaram ji Temple, the largest temple of all the temples of Galta ji. This murti is unique, as it is the incarnation of both Lord Rama and Lord Krishna. The Lord appeared here in front of Tulsidas in His form, and later Tulsidas wrote down what he had seen. According to that description, the murti of Ram Gopal was created.

On the hills around, there are many temples that have been ruined. They had been built long before Galta Ji.

Galta ji Temple was built in the XVIII century, but even before the temple was built, saints and sadhus had lived on these hills for ages. As of the XV century, this place had been the sanctuary for the followers of Swami Ramananda.

Ramananda (lived around 1400-1470) was a Vaishnava saint, a guru, a follower of Sri Ramanujacharya and the founder of the Ramanandi Sampradaya.

Ramananda accepted disciples regardless of caste and religious confessions. This led to a conflict with brahmanas and encouraged Ramananda to leave Sri Vaishnavism and establish his own sampradaya. His most famous disciples were Dhanna Bhagat, Kabir, Nabhadas, Bhagat Pipa, Ravidas, Bhagat Sain and Tulsidas.

Ramananda's teachings were very close to Sri Vaishnavism. He left the caste differentiation behind and started transferring the sacred knowledge in Hindi, instead of Sanskrit, which many people didn't understand. In the commentaries to Guru Gita, Gurudev told one story from the life of Ramananda and his disciple Kabir.

'Kabir lived in the city of Varanasi, Kashi, where there was a great saint by the name Ramananda. Ramananda was a great devotee of Lord Rama and his ashram was well-known; everybody knew that he was a great saint. Kabir wanted so much to be a disciple of Ramananda, because he knew that Ramananda was his Guru.



As Kabir grew up in a Muslim family, whenever he would approach the ashram, the disciples of Sri Ramananda would get angry and push him away. But, Kabir wanted to go inside so much that he used to sit in front of the door and would not move.

You see, Kabirji was actually never born. Kabir was found on a lotus by a Muslim couple. They were childless - similar to Shirdi Sai - they found him inside the lotus and then they brought him up. And for him also, there was no difference: he was always chanting the Name of Ram; he was always praising Allah and Ram. The same. Because the Name of God is One. God is One.

Kabirji had mentally accepted Ramananda as his Guru. Kabir had this deep devotion, so every day he would make it a must to go to the door of the ashram once or twice a day to try at least to see his Guru. Sometimes he would beg the residents of the ashram, 'Please, at least tell Gurudev that I want to meet him!' If he could meet him, even once in his life, that would be enough. He didn't want anything else. He just wanted to have Guru Diksha of Ramananda. But, they would push him away and sometimes they would beat him up. You know, at that time the Hindus were very dogmatic and would't allow other castes or religions to enter the Hindu places. Well, today it's still like this.

As a great devotee of Lord Rama, Ramananda had a deep connection with Him. Once he had a mental vision of Rama and in that vision he saw Rama and Lakshman talking to each other. Rama was saying to Lakshman, 'Let's leave this ashram and go away from here. Let's move out! Why should we stay here, when a true bhakta is being pushed away?' Because, you know, the Lord Himself dwells in the heart of the bhakta. Lakshman, who was generally quick-tempered said, 'Let's leave this ashram right away! Let us not waste our time here! What are we doing in a place where a sincere devotee is being thrown out?' When Ramananda saw that the deity, his beloved Rama was going to leave the ashram, he said, 'Please Lord, don't leave this servant of yours! I am totally unaware of what happening in this ashram. Please tell me where I failed!'



Then Lord Rama Told him, 'One of My devotees is longing to be initiated into My Divine Name! He came to your ashram every single day, and your disciples pushed him away. He has such Bhakti inside of him! He just wanted to have a glimpse of you and receive the mantra from you, nothing else!' So, receiving the Guru Mantra is very, very, very, very important. Even Kabir, who was a great soul, an incarnation of the Lord Himself, longed for the initiation into the Guru Mantra.

When Ramananda heard about this occurrence in the ashram, he was shocked and promised Lord Rama that he would look into that issue immediately. Then he asked Lord Rama, 'Please give me a chance to correct my mistake and do not leave this slave of yours.' Sri Rama agreed to stay in Ramananda's ashram, but under one condition: His bhakta Kabirdas should not be driven away from the ashram. As soon as Sri Ramananda came back to himself, he told his disciples what had happened with Sri Ramaji. The disciples felt embarrassed and confessed that every day a Muslim did come to have Darshan of Gurudev, but they pushed him away thinking that Sri Ramananda would not be pleased to meet a Muslim.

Ramananda had a deep pain inside of his heart, because he had given true knowledge to his disciples. Yet what had they done? They had done the opposite, thinking that they knew better. So Ramananda could not sleep all night. On the other side, Kabir could not sleep either. Kabir was lying down on the steps leading to the bank of the Ganges, crying intensely, weeping, 'Why can't I meet my Guru? Why can't I receive the Divine Grace of the Holy Name from Him? Oh Lord Rama, another day has passed and I have not received Your Divine Name. I have even had the Grace of seeing my Guru. When will I have the fortune of having Darshan of my Gurudev and receive aadesh from Him, receive the Diksha from Him?'

As Ramananda could not sleep, he decided to go for ablution in the Ganges. It was early morning and it was dark everywhere. Ramananda walked to the bank of the Ganges with a heavy heart and in a reflective mood. As he was going towards the Ganges, his sandal, his paduka touched the head of someone lying on the step.



You know, whenever a saint steps on something, the first thing they do is to chant, to call the Name of God. Ramananda always had 'Ram, Ram, Ram' in his mind, when his paduka touched the body of Kabir, he said, 'Ram, Ram, Ram' straight away. At that moment, Kabir held the Feet of the Master, crying profusely.

The touch of the Feet of the Master to Kabir! He was so into that divine ecstasy, that longing for his Gurudev, that the touch of the paduka itself revealed that Sri Ramananda was his Guru. At that moment he got Guru Diksha and Guru Mantra directly from his Guru. The energy current flew from the paduka of Ramananda to Kabir and when the Guru Said, 'Ram, Ram, Ram' he received the mantra 'Ram' as the Guru Mantra. There was tremendous rejoicing in the heart of Kabir when he looked up at his Guru and said, 'You have not just given the Guru Mantra in the ears only, like a Guru formally does, but you blessed me even with your paduka. You have stepped over me. You have touched me with it! How fortunate I am indeed!' Kabirdasji was in such an ecstasy, chanting the Name of 'Ram, Ram, Ram', dancing and crying out of joy that Ramananda felt deeply moved with his devotion and love. This shows that when people are really surrendered to the Guru, they feel a great bhav inside of them. Not just a plain bhav, but they have this great joy which Lord Shiva has been talking about in the Guru Gita. It's an eternal joy which comes from deep within one's heart.

There is this writing of Kabirji which says, 'If I have the chance to see both God and my Guru at the same time, I would worship my Guru before I prostrate to God. Guru is like a mother. The mother takes care of the child from the day she conceives him/her. She puts up with lots of difficulties and sacrifices her desires for the welfare of the child. My Guru took me into His arms and fondled me when I was called a sinner by the rest of the world just as a mother would fondle her child. But God turned to look at me only after I was purified by the Grace and Love of my Guru just as a father would cherish and see his grown up child holding a high position in society, and shares none of the difficulties of the mother.' Kabir praised his Guru with such wonderful praises!



*Guru Govind dovo khade, kaake laagav pay balihari Guru aapne,
Govind deeyo dataaye*
*«To whom shall I take refuge? To the Feet of God or to the Feet of the
Guru? Because without the Guru's Grace I would never know God, but
with the Guru's Grace I know God. So for me my Guru is my God.»*
That's what Kabirji said.»

Verse 97

Sri Guru Gita. Commentary on the great mysteries of the Guru-disciple relationship.
Paramahansa Vishwananda





DAY 5

October 29, Tuesday

Back to Vrindavan. Visit a few temples.

Radha Damodara Temple

Jiva Goswami installed the deities of Radha Damodara in 1542 here. During the Muslim expansion, they moved the deities to Rajasthan under the protection of the Rajputs. Not all the deities of Vrindavan have returned to their native places; in some temples they now worship newly made murtis. But Radha Damodara had returned to Vrindavan. In the inner courtyard of the temple complex, there are mandir dedicated to samadhi of Srila Jiva Goswami, Srila Krishnadasa Kaviraja Goswami, Srila Bhakti Pramode Puri Goswami and some other saints. The deities of this temple were carved by one of the 6 most famous Goswamis of Vrindavan – Shрила Rupa Goswami. Srila Rupa Goswami's Samadhi and Bhajan Kutir are also located at Radha Damodar Mandir. Near the Samadhi of Rupa Goswami in this temple is the place where Jiva Goswami used to wash his feet. Radha Damodara Temple has become famous as a place of learning due to its extensive library of rare books and manuscripts.



Radha Shyamasundara Temple

On the altar we can see big deities of Sri Radha Shyamasundar, which appeared more later than the main deities. The original small deities of Sri Radha Shyamasundara are standing on the right side of the altar. Deity of Shyamasundara was given by Srimati Radharani Herself to the Saint Shyamananda Prabhu, whose name was Dukhi Krishna at that time. Swami Vishwaparanthapananda: 'In Switzerland I was telling the story of Dukhi Krishna, who is Shyamananda Prabhu, you remember? Dukhi Krishna was born in Calkutta. And when he was born, they knew that he was different, you know? So, at the age of twelve, he heard there was a famous guru in Mayapur. He knew inside his heart, He is the guru for him. So, he wanted to go there, but as being so young, he could not go. So, at the age of twelve, he ran away to the feet of his guru. So, when he reached Mayapur, his gurudev accepted him. And his duty was to water the plants. He had to walk a lot, fetching the water on his head.

So throughout his life, throughout his service, he had a tremendous joy of serving his master. So much so, that he forgot about himself - in his mind, there was only his guru. There was no himself. So, he was walking every day, serving him. During that time, on his head, he got some wounds, and the wounds got infected, and as he was walking past the guru, there were worms in the infected area and they fell down. The guru called him and said, 'My dear, you have worms on your head, you have hurt yourself.' Only at that moment did he realise that he was hurt. Because for him, it was not about himself, it was about the guru, serving the master. So, because of that love, the guru was very touched and very pleased. So with his yogic shakti, he healed him instantly and he embraced him. Saying, 'You have served me well all these years. You have never asked me for anything.' And he replied to the guru, 'My life is to serve you, I have surrendered to you. I have taken shelter at your feet, not to please myself, but to please you. You are the only one that I aim for.' Then the guru was so touched and so pleased that he said to him, 'Your service to me here in Mayapur is finished now. I want you to carry on your service in Vrindavan.' So, he sent him to Vrindavan.



This was in the 1600's or something. He sent him to Vrindavan and said to him, 'When you are in Vrindavan, I want you to sweep the floor on the path to Nidhivan.' Nidhivan is where Lord Krishna is still doing the Rasa-lila. Because this lila, it happens even now, every night, and the gopis are dancing with Krishna. So, he said to him, 'Go there and sweep the floors, and serve me there.' So, when Dukhi Krishna went to Vrindavan he was constantly always thinking of his gurudev, nothing else. And he was sweeping the floor with so much joy. He never once asked 'Why am I doing this?'. He never asked 'Which kind of seva should I do?'. The guru had instructed, and without thinking, he was serving.

So, as he was cleaning one day, he found an anklet. Looking at this anklet with diamonds and gold, he was thinking, 'To whom could that belong? Such a precious thing can only belong to a queen.' And to his knowledge, there was no queen visiting Vrindavan during that time. So, there was only one queen left, that's Srimati Radharani. She's the only queen there now. So, he was wondering, he was thinking about it, holding the anklet. At that moment, in the other dimension, Radharani was returning from the Ras, and She noticed that Her anklet was missing from Her foot. So She turned to Lalita and said, 'Lalita, when we were dancing, one of My anklets fell down, go and get it back. I can't go back to My house, otherwise the people will ask Me, 'where did You lose Your anklet?''

You see, you have to understand that in the other dimension, the whole lila is still happening continuously. So Lalita appeared into the physical world again, of course not in her true form, she changed into the form as a young girl. So, she saw that Dukhi Krishna was holding the anklet. So, she went and said, 'Please give me this anklet, this belongs to my mistress. Give it to me.' Of course, when Dukhi Krishna held the anklet in his hand, he felt that it is not a normal anklet, it surely belonged to Srimati Radharani. So, he said, 'No. I will not give it to you.' Then he said, 'If your mistress has lost it, tell Her to come and get it Herself. Then I will give it back.' So, she insisted, but Dukhi Krishna insisted back. He was very stubborn not to give it.



Lalita, thought, 'Okay, I can't change him.' So, she went back into the other world and said to Radharani, 'Difficult situation my dear. There is this guy down there, he has got Your anklet, and he doesn't want to give it up. I even fought with him, but he doesn't want to give it, and he said that You should come and get it.' Radharani said, 'How can I go there?' But how can She also go home without the anklet? So, it was a big dilemma. So Srimati Radharani said, 'Okay fine, let's go.' They appeared back again into this physical world but in disguise. So when She materialized with Lalita, they came to Dukhi Krishna, and said to him, 'Please give Me My anklet, that's Mine. Look, the other one is on My foot, give Me the second one back.'

Dukhi Krishna said, 'No.' He said, 'I know who You are.' She said, 'What do you mean?' And Dukhi Krishna said, 'Well I would like to see Your true form, so please show me Your true form, then I will give the anklet back.' Then Radharani tried to say, 'Are you crazy? What are you talking about? Which true form are you talking about?'

At that moment, he knew that deep inside of himself, through the guru's grace, through the guru kripa, he had the insight of who was in front of him. So, She didn't have any choice and at that moment She appeared in Her true aspect in front of him. And Srimati Radharani pulled up Her foot, Her leg, and asked Dukhi Krishna to tie the anklet back onto Her feet. When he did that, he was in deep ecstasy, he was in deep bhav. So, Sri Radharani gave him the name Shyamananda. And with the anklet, She touched it to his forehead, leaving a mark. So, when Sri Radharani disappeared, this mark was still there. He tried to remove it, but he could not, so this became the guru dot.

Through the guru's grace, he received the grace of Sri Radharani, he received the grace of God, only through the guru's grace, only through serving, with single-minded devotion to the guru. Even if he had never been initiated into any mantra, nothing, but only by the adesh, only by the instruction of the guru, and the love, the love and the service that he had for the guru, attained one of the highest form of devotion.



There's another time when Srimati Radharani appeared to him, and from Her heart, She gave the daity of Shyamasundar to him. So this is just a reminder, that only through service, single-minded devotion to the master, one attains the grace of the Lord.'

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In a courtyard of the temple, you can find a place of Samadhi of Sri Shyamananda and exactly that place of his meeting with Srimati Radharani and Her sakhi Lalita (on the photo).





Mirabai Kutir

Mirabai is the famous Indian Saint, who has spent a part of her life in Vrindavan. Mirabai was born in approximately 1500 year into a royal family in Rajasthan. When she was three years old, a sadhu came to their house. He had a murti Giridhari Gopal. And when little Mirabai saw Giridhari, she began to cry and beg Him for herself. The saint didn't know if he should give Him to her. But at night Krishna Himself came to him in a dream and said that this was the purpose of his coming here - to give Giridhari Gopal Mirabai. And in the morning the saint gave his murti to the little princess. As she was growing older, she became so attached to Krishna that she decided to make Him her friend, lover and husband for life. At the insistence of her family, Mirabai has married a young prince from a kshatriya family, but despite her marriage, she was always focused on worshipping Krishna.

This deep attachment to Krishna was not to the liking of her family. There were a few attempts to kill her, but they were destroyed by the boundless love of Mira for Krishna and Krishna for her. Mirabai's poetry reflects the moments of miracles in her life.



'I dance with ankle-bells on my feet.
People say I am mad; my mother-in-law
said I ruined the family reputation.
Rana sent me a cup of poison and I drank it laughing.
I dedicate my body and soul at the Feet of Hari.
I am thirsty for the nectar of the sight of Him.
My Lord is Giridhar Nagar;
I will come for refuge to Him.'

Mirabai

She invariably signed all her poems: 'Giridhar Gopal'. Over time, the situation at home deteriorated, until one day Mirabai went to Vrindavan and stopped at the place where her temple is now located.

On the altar are Radha Manohara, and to the left of the deities is the deity Mirabai singing bajan. There, on the altar, is the Shaligram, into which the snake turned after her touch. To the right of the altar is a small room where she lived.

Mirabai once came to Saint Jiva Goswami to receive darshan. He refused to accept her, saying that he does not communicate with women. But Mirabai replied: 'In Vrindavan, all women and only Giridhar Gopal - Purusha (male)! But I just found out today that there is another Purusha besides Krishna.' Jiva Goswami was amazed. He understood that Mirabai is a parama-bhakta, a great devotee of the Lord.

DAY 6

October 30, Wednesday

Journey to Agra to visit the Taj Mahal, the most beautiful royal tomb in India. Dantheras celebration at Shree Giridhar Dham.



AGRA





Taj Mahal

The Taj Mahal stands on the banks of the Jamna River. It was built by order of the Padishah of the Mughal Empire, Shah Jahan I, in memory of his beloved wife Mumtaz Mahal, who died at the age of 38 while giving birth to her fourteenth child.

Mumtaz Mahal, born Arjumand Banu, was a Persian princess and queen of the Mughal Empire. She was an intelligent, modest and straightforward young woman with a passion for learning, fluent in Arabic and Persian, and wrote poetry.

In 1612, at the age of 19, Mumtaz married Shah Jahan, who later became the emperor.

Mumtaz was the third of the Shah's six wives. There was a deep and sincere affection between them. She followed her husband everywhere and accompanied him on all his military campaigns. During 19 years of marriage, Mumtaz gave birth to 14 children. At the last childbirth, which took place during a campaign, she died. A year after the death of his beloved wife, the emperor grieved and spent all his time in seclusion. When he appeared in front of his subjects a year later, he was not recognizable. He turned gray and hunched over, even though he was just 40 years old.

Life without his beloved wife was hard for him, according to chroniclers, Shah Jahan stopped listening to music, refused jewelry, smart clothes and social events.



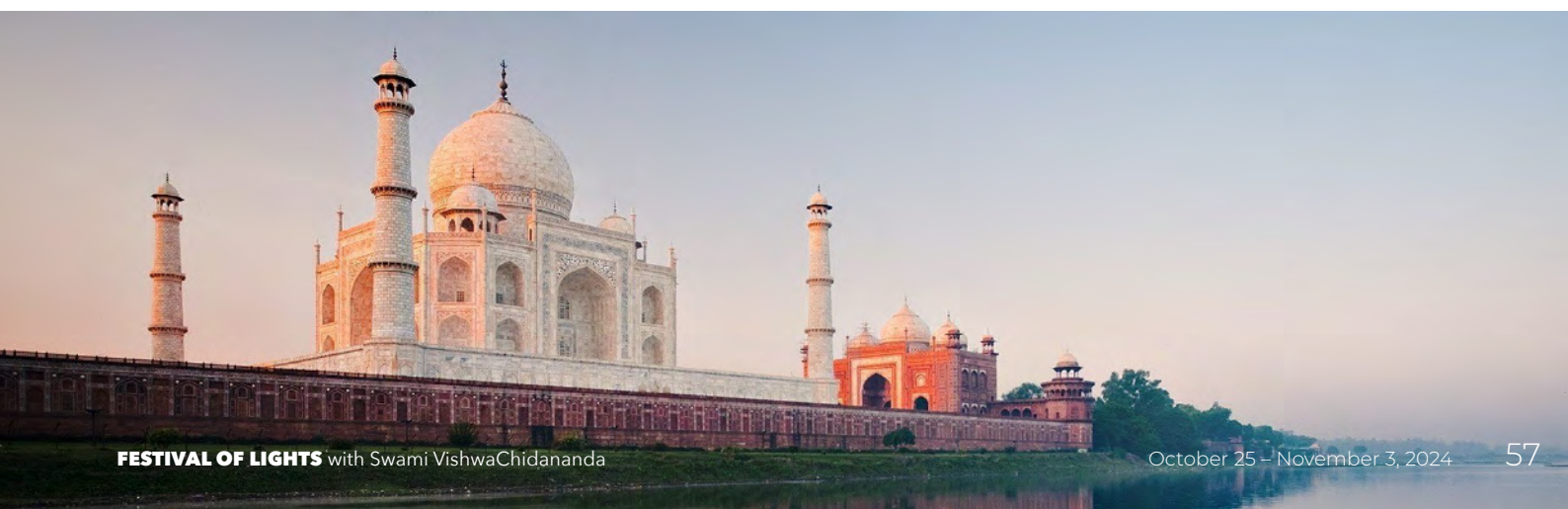
Despite the fact that Shah Jahan was considered one of the best mogol's emperors, after the death of his beloved wife, he had an unhappy life. He fell seriously ill in September 1657, causing his sons to start fighting for the succession of the throne. His third son won this fight. Shah Jahan recovered, but his son sent him to prison in the fort of Agra overlooking the Taj Mahal. Shah Jahan spent the last 9 years of his life there. He died in 1666 at the age of 77.

Shah Jahan was buried next to his wife in the Taj Mahal.

The construction of the Taj Mahal began in 1632, a year after Mumtaz's death, and lasted for more than 20 years. More than 22,000 craftsmen from all over the empire, as well as masters from Central Asia, Persia and the Middle East, were invited to build the complex.

The walls of the mausoleum are lined with polished translucent marble inlaid with gems. Turquoise, agate, malachite, carnelian, etc. were used. Twenty-eight types of precious and semi-precious stones were inlaid in white marble. This type of marble has the property of changing color depending on the weather and time of day. In bright daylight, it looks milky white, pink at dawn, golden at sunset, and pearl-silver on a moonlit night.

The Taj Mahal is considered the best example of Mughal architecture, which combines elements of Indian, Persian and Arabic architectural styles. In 1983, the Taj Mahal was named by UNESCO as 'the pearl of Muslim art in India and one of the universally recognized masterpieces of World Heritage'.





DAY 7

October 31, Thursday

Parikrama around Vrindavan, on the way visit famous temples and places where Krishna's lilas took place. Visit to Barsana, the place where Srimati Radharani grew up, and temples with self-manifested deities.

Kaliya Ghat

Sometime long ago, this was part of Yamuna, where now there is Kaliya Ghat. Once Eagle Garuda, Sriman Narayana's vahana, was flying over this place with a pot of Amrita. He landed on a tree on the river shore to take a rest, and drops of the Divine nectar fell on the branches of this tree making it immortal. Garuda saw a large fish in the river, flew to the water, caught it and ate it. This fish was the king of all fishes, and the other fish in the water expressed dissatisfaction to Garuda.

Not far from that place, Saubhari Muni was performing penance; he had been standing in the water reaching his neck for many years.



The fish addressed him for justice, and Saubhari Muni cursed Garuda saying: 'If you try to approach this place, next time your head will fall off.' Garuda did not pay specific attention to this and flew away, but, due to this curse, the waters of Yamuna became home to many serpents, who found shelter there from the Divine Eagle Garuda. Venomous serpent Kaliya lived on the Ramanaka Island. On that island, serpents lived calmly, as they would give fruit offerings to Garuda every year.

Kaliya became puffed up, ate all the offerings himself and sent a challenge to Garuda. They started fighting, and soon Kaliya realized that he could not beat Garuda and rushed to the Yamuna waters for safety. He knew about the curse of Saubhari Muni and that Garuda would not be able to reach that place.

With time, Kaliya's venom poisoned the waters of the Yamuna. Smallest drops of water spread the venom by air, and soon everything alive on the shores also died. Everything, except for the tree, where Garuda had rested. Later, having heard the prayers of Yamuna-devi, Krishna jumped into water from that tree and released Yamuna from the venomous serpent.

Srimad Bhagavatam Canto 10, Chapter 16

Text 8:

Kṛṣṇa began sporting in Kāliya's lake like a lordly elephant – swirling His mighty arms and making the water resound in various ways. When Kāliya heard these sounds, he understood that someone was trespassing in his lake. The serpent could not tolerate this and immediately came forward.

Text 9:

Kāliya saw that Śrī Kṛṣṇa, who wore yellow silken garments, was very delicate, His attractive body shining like a glowing white cloud, His chest bearing the mark of Śrīvatsa, His face smiling beautifully and His feet resembling the whorl of a lotus flower. The Lord was playing fearlessly in the water. Despite His wonderful appearance, the envious Kāliya furiously bit Him on the chest and then completely enwrapped Him in his coils.

**Text 10:**

When the members of the cowherd community, who had accepted Kṛṣṇa as their dearest friend, saw Him enveloped in the snake's coils, motionless, they were greatly disturbed. They had offered Kṛṣṇa everything – their very selves, their families, their wealth, wives and all pleasures. At the sight of the Lord in the clutches of the Kāliya snake, their intelligence became deranged by grief, lamentation and fear, and thus they fell to the ground.

Text 11:

The cows, bulls and female calves, in great distress, called out piteously to Kṛṣṇa. Fixing their eyes on Him, they stood still in fear, as if ready to cry but too shocked to shed tears.

Text 16:

The Supreme Lord Balarāma, the master of all transcendental knowledge, smiled and said nothing when He saw the residents of Vṛndāvana in such distress, since He understood the extraordinary power of His younger brother.

Text 22:

Lord Balarāma then saw that Nanda Mahārāja and the other cowherd men, who had dedicated their very lives to Kṛṣṇa, were beginning to enter the serpent's lake. As the Supreme Personality of Godhead, Lord Balarāma fully knew Lord Kṛṣṇa's actual power, and therefore He restrained them.

Text 23:

The Lord remained for some time within the coils of the serpent, imitating the behavior of an ordinary mortal. But when He understood that the women, children and other residents of His village of Gokula were in acute distress because of their love for Him, their only shelter and goal in life, He immediately rose up from the bonds of the Kāliya serpent.

**Text 24:**

His coils tormented by the expanding body of the Lord, Kāliya released Him. In great anger the serpent then raised his hoods high and stood still, breathing heavily. His nostrils appeared like vessels for cooking poison, and the staring eyes in his face like firebrands. Thus the serpent looked at the Lord.

Text 25:

Again and again Kāliya licked his lips with his bifurcated tongues as He stared at Kṛṣṇa with a glance full of terrible, poisonous fire. But Kṛṣṇa playfully circled around him, just as Garuḍa would play with a snake. In response, Kāliya also moved about, looking for an opportunity to bite the Lord.

Text 26:

Having severely depleted the serpent's strength with His relentless circling, Śrī Kṛṣṇa, the origin of everything, pushed down Kāliya's raised shoulders and mounted his broad serpentine heads. Thus Lord Śrī Kṛṣṇa, the original master of all fine arts, began to dance, His lotus feet deeply reddened by the touch of the numerous jewels upon the serpent's heads.

Text 28:

My dear King, Kāliya had 101 prominent heads, and when one of them would not bow down, Lord Śrī Kṛṣṇa, who inflicts punishment on cruel wrong-doers, would smash that stubborn head by striking it with His feet. Then, as Kāliya entered his death throes, he began wheeling his heads around and vomiting ghastly blood from his mouths and nostrils. The serpent thus experienced extreme pain and misery.

Text 30:

My dear King Parīkṣit, Lord Kṛṣṇa's wonderful, powerful dancing trampled and broke all of Kāliya's one thousand hoods. Then the serpent, profusely vomiting blood from his mouths, finally recognized Śrī Kṛṣṇa to be the eternal Personality of Godhead, the supreme master of all moving and nonmoving beings, Śrī Nārāyaṇa. Thus within his mind Kāliya took shelter of the Lord.

**Text 31:**

When Kāliya's wives saw how the serpent had become so fatigued from the excessive weight of Lord Kṛṣṇa, who carries the entire universe in His abdomen, and how Kāliya's umbrellalike hoods had been shattered by the striking of Kṛṣṇa's heels, they felt great distress. With their clothing, ornaments and hair scattered in disarray, they then approached the eternal Personality of Godhead.

Text 33:

The wives of the Kāliya serpent said: The punishment this offender has been subjected to is certainly just. After all, You have incarnated within this world to curb down envious and cruel persons. You are so impartial that You look equally upon Your enemies and Your own sons, for when You impose a punishment on a living being You know it to be for his ultimate benefit.

Text 36:

O Lord, we do not know how the serpent Kāliya has attained this great opportunity of being touched by the dust of Your lotus feet. For this end, the goddess of fortune performed austerities for centuries, giving up all other desires and observing austere vows.

**Text 37:**

Those who have attained the dust of Your lotus feet never hanker for the kingship of heaven, limitless sovereignty, the position of Brahmā or rulership over the earth. They are not interested even in the perfections of yoga or in liberation itself.

Text 39:

We offer our obeisances unto You, the Supreme Personality of Godhead. Although present in the hearts of all living beings as the Supersoul, You are all-pervasive. Although the original shelter of all created material elements, You exist prior to their creation. And although the cause of everything, You are transcendental to all material cause and effect, being the Supreme Soul.

Text 52:

O Supreme Lord, please be merciful. It is proper for the saintly to feel compassion for women like us. This serpent is about to give up his life. Please give us back our husband, who is our life and soul.

Text 53:

Now please tell us, Your maidservants, what we should do. Certainly anyone who faithfully executes Your order is automatically freed from all fear.

Text 55:

Kāliya slowly regained his vital force and sensory functions. Then, breathing loudly and painfully, the poor serpent addressed Lord Kṛṣṇa, the Supreme Personality of Godhead, in humble submission.

Text 56:

The serpent Kāliya said: Our very birth as a snake has made us envious, ignorant and constantly angry. O my Lord, it is so difficult for people to give up their conditioned nature, by which they identify with that which is unreal.

**Text 58:**

O Supreme Personality of Godhead, among all the species within Your material creation, we serpents are by nature always enraged. Being thus deluded by Your illusory energy, which is very difficult to give up, how can we possibly give it up on our own?

Text 59:

O Lord, since You are the omniscient Lord of the universe, You are the actual cause of freedom from illusion. Please arrange for us whatever You consider proper, whether it be mercy or punishment.

Text 60:

Śukadeva Gosvāmī said: After hearing Kāliya's words, the Supreme Personality of Godhead, who was acting the role of a human being, replied: O serpent, you may not remain here any longer. Go back to the ocean immediately, accompanied by your retinue of children, wives, other relatives and friends. Let this river be enjoyed by the cows and humans.

Text 61:

If a mortal being attentively remembers My command to you – to leave Vṛndāvana and go to the ocean – and narrates this account at sunrise and sunset, he will never be afraid of you.

Text 62:

If one bathes in this place of My pastimes and offers the water of this lake to the demigods and other worshipable personalities, or if one observes a fast and duly worships and remembers Me, he is sure to become free from all sinful reactions.

Text 63:

Out of fear of Garuḍa, you left Ramaṇaka Island and came to take shelter of this lake. But because you are now marked with My footprints, Garuḍa will no longer try to eat you.

**Text 64:**

Śukadeva Gosvāmī continued: My dear King, having been released by Lord Kṛṣṇa, the Supreme Personality of Godhead, whose activities are wonderful, Kāliya joined his wives in worshiping Him with great joy and reverence.

Texts 65-67:

Kāliya worshiped the Lord of the universe by offering Him fine garments, along with necklaces, jewels and other valuable ornaments, wonderful scents and ointments, and a large garland of lotus flowers. Having thus pleased the Lord, whose flag is marked with the emblem of Garuḍa, Kāliya felt satisfied. Receiving the Lord's permission to leave, Kāliya circumambulated Him and offered Him obeisances. Then, taking his wives, friends and children, he went to his island in the sea. The very moment Kāliya left, the Yamunā was immediately restored to her original condition, free from poison and full of nectarean water. This happened by the mercy of the Supreme Personality of Godhead, who was manifesting a humanlike form to enjoy His pastimes.





Imli Tala

Not far from the Sri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu Temple, there is the Vraja-Mohan Temple. The main deities on the altar here are Radha-Vraja-Mohan; they were installed during the first Gaura Purnima festival (the celebration of the Day of Appearance of Chaitanya Mahaprabhu), that took place approximately 30 years after Lord Chaitanya Mahaprabhu had left.

In the Temple's yard is an ancient tamarind (Imli-tala) tree. This tree has been here since ancient times. Here, the beautiful lila between Radha and Krishna took place, witnessed by Srila Rupa Goswami.

Rupa Goswami came here once and sat under the tree to sing bhajans to the Lord. He glanced up and saw a beautiful swing on one of the branches. Then he saw Radha, Krishna, and all Their friends. Krishna jumped on the swing and asked Radharani to join Him. At first, Radharani refused because Krishna would always swing very high, which would frighten Her. Krishna, however, started persuading Radharani, and gopis and gopas joined His request, and Radharani agreed.

So the friends started pushing the swing gently with Radha and Krishna. When Krishna saw that Radha became relaxed, He moved His legs softly so the swing would go a little higher. But, before everyone knew it, the swing already went too high. Srimati Radharani got very frightened and demanded that Krishna stop the swing and let Her go.

Krishna moved the swing higher and higher. Finally, it went so high that it seemed it was about to come off the tree. Suddenly, in fear, Radharani screamed and grabbed Krishna. Krishna was happy to see Radharani hold Him so tightly. He pushed the swing further so that they made a full circle.



After Srila Rupa Goswami witnessed all this, he fell into an ecstatic swoon and passed out. When he regained consciousness, Radha and Krishna had already gone, but the swing was still hanging on that tree. He was surprised to see that the tree had twisted under it.

Once, during the Rasa Dance, Srimati Radharani suddenly ran away. Krishna started looking for Her, but with no success. Finally, He came to that tree, sat under it on the Yamuna shore, and repeated: 'Radhe! Radhe! Radhe!' From this intense emotion of separation from His beloved, Krishna's body gradually became the same golden color as that of Srimati Radharani. He started feeling the same as She did then.

When Sri Radha appeared surrounded by Her gopi friends, She was astonished by this golden form of Her beloved. Radha asked: 'What is the meaning of this astonishing form You took? I have never seen You look like this before.' Then Krishna explained that soon, in Kali-yuga, He would take this form fulfilled with Her love for Him.

Around 500 years ago, Krishna came again as Sri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu, the golden incarnation of Krishna. During the pilgrimage to Vrindavan, He often went to this tree and sang the Holy Names of the Lord. During the singing, His body became darker, and Lord Chaitanya became as dark as Shyam.

The initial tree, under which Lord Krishna and Lord Chaitanya sat, recently left this world. It was a large branchy tree, and one large branch was hanging over one neighbor's land. A man who lived near this Temple did not like that this branch was reaching over to his yard, so he cut it off.

After the first blow of the ax, blood dashed from the branch. In Vrindavan, trees are live creatures who come there to meditate on Krishna. Soon after the Imli Tala tree was wounded, the tree dried out. When the branch was cut off, the tree should not have gone dry, but the tree took it very much to heart.



Nowadays, the trunk of this tree is still kept in a metal shell. When it became apparent that the tree would not survive, the devotees took its branch and planted it at the base of the old one. The new tree is now growing, and the old one can still be seen nearby. Under the tree, there is a deity of Sri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu.





Shringar Vat

At this divine location, Sri Krishna personally adorned Sri Radharani with flowers. 'Shringar' denotes decoration, and 'Vat' refers to a Banyan tree. This site, known as Shringar Vat, is one of the oldest places and temples in Vrindavan.

Sri Radharani once left the Raas dance, and concealed Herself under a Banyan tree. Krishna, in search of Radharani, discovered Her under the Banyan tree. While seated beneath its branches, He intricately decorated Sri Radharani's hair with exquisite forest flowers, applied kajal to Her gleaming eyes, and adorned Her body with ornaments embedded with precious gems and stones.

During his visits to Vrindavan, Nityananda Prabhu would stay under this Banyan tree, absorbed in chanting the names of Lord Krishna.

The sacred Shringar Vat in Vrindavan safeguards the original Japa beads of Sri Jiva Goswami, belonging to Nityananda Prabhu, and the handwritten books penned by Sri Rupa Goswami and Jiva Goswami. Even today, visitors have the opportunity to witness and seek the blessings of these sacred relics.





Jagannath Mandir

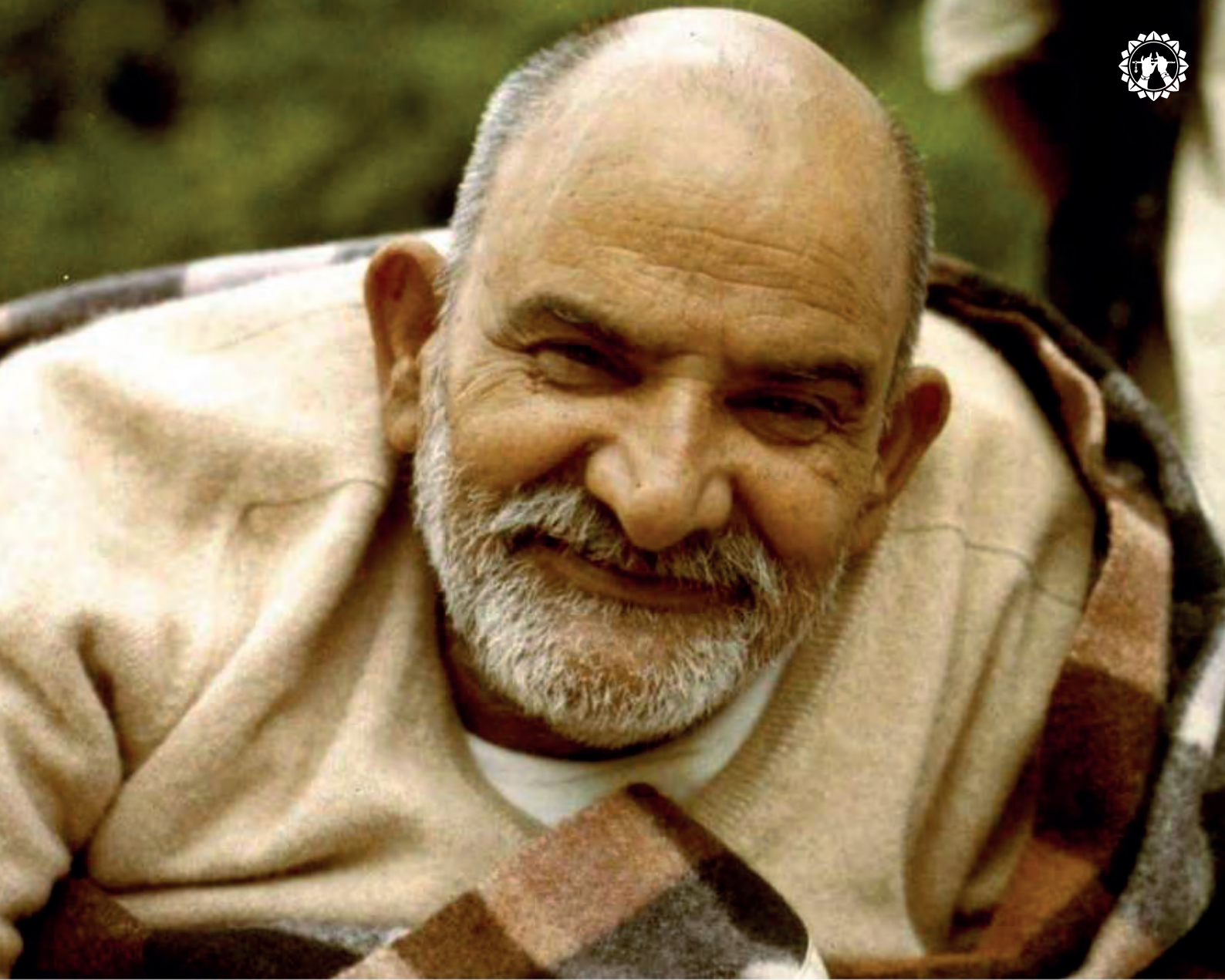
Around 500 years ago, Lord Sri Krishna appeared before Sri Haridasji, a great Saint of Vrindavan, and instructed him to replace the existing images of Jagannath, Balram, and Subhadra Devi with new ones in the month of Ashadh. Lord Krishna ordered Haridas to bring the old vigrahas to Vrindavan.

The tradition in Jagannath Puri involves replacing the old wooden murtis with new ones approximately every thirty-six years during the anavasar period between Snana Yatra and Ratha Yatra.

Haridas, accompanied by his disciples, undertook a journey on foot to Puri and reached there four days before Rath Yatra. He requested the temple priest to hand over the old vigrahas as per Lord Krishna's instructions. However, the priest directed him to seek authorization from King Maharaja Pratap Rudra, who initially refused due to the tradition of immersing the old vigrahas in the ocean.

Facing this obstacle, Saint Haridas entered deep meditation on the seashore, contemplating the orders of his Lord. In a dream at midnight, Lord Jagannath directed the King to hand over the old vigrahas to Haridasji, as Lord Krishna desired to be worshipped both in Puri and Vrindavan.

Following this divine intervention, the King granted the old vigrahas to Haridas, who, along with his disciples, brought them to Vrindavan in a cart. A temple was then constructed on the banks of the sacred river Yamuna, at the location where Lord Krishna had appeared to Haridas. This site is now known as Jagannath Ghat, and the deities have been worshipped there since then.



Neeb Karori Baba Ashram

Baba Neeb Karori Maharaj was born in Uttar Pradesh, India, in a wealthy family in Akbarpur village. Orphaned at an early age, he married at eleven and left home at twelve. He travelled for 10-12 years, earning recognition for his service and devotion in Rajasthan and Rajkot.

In Bavania village, he meditated by a water pond, earning the name Talaiyaa Baba. Eventually, he settled in Neeb Karori village, Farrukhabad district. The villagers built a cave for his spiritual practices, where he lived and engaged with the community.



Maharaj displayed mystical abilities, astonishing the villagers with his playfulness and supernatural abilities. Despite his unassuming nature, he had a profound impact on people from different backgrounds.

Numerous anecdotes happened in Neeb Karori's life, such as the train incident. Once he went to Farrukhabad in the first-class compartment of a train. Seeing his sadhu-like appearance, an Anglo-Indian conductor told him to get off the train at the next station. Neeb Karori got off and sat on the platform. Following this, no matter the efforts of the station staff, the train could not move. The conductor could not explain the problem since no mechanical defect was found – the engine was running, but the wheels would not turn. Some railway employees asked Maharaj in jest to make the train move. Maharaj said, 'I got kicked out of the train and you are asking me to let it move!' An employee replied, 'Perhaps you had no ticket.' At this, Neeb Karori showed them several genuine first-class tickets. Amazed, the train staff begged him to re-board the train and once he boarded the train started moving.

There was an inexplicable bliss in the households that Neeb Karori Baba visited. No effort was needed to find out where he was in the town at any particular moment because his presence could be felt by the spirit of joy and festivity pervading that place.

Neeb Kakori Baba was a family man who managed to take care of everyone in his large spiritual family. He regarded all human beings as his own children and treated them accordingly. He often said, 'You get tired with just a few children, but I have so many.' A devotee shared that Maharaj once said, 'Why do you come to me? You come to me because of my love for you.' He nurtured the concept of vasudhaiva-kutumbakam (the world as one family) and would say that love binds all together.

In 1973, Neeb Kakori Baba left his physical form in Vrindavan, leaving behind a legacy of divine presence.



Barsana

The very name 'Barsana' means 'falling', 'scattering' or 'spreading'. The meaning of Barsana as explained by saints here is that mercy and karuna (compassion, love) of Srimati Radharani is spreading, falling or scattering here on everybody.

The beloved of Krishna was raised in Barsana. Sri Radha was hurrying from here with Her gopi friends, once Her Kanhā would barely start playing His flute.

Barsana is a small town not far from Vrindavan, where there was the palace of Vrishabhanu, Radha's father. Barsana is circled with a seven-kilometer parikrama road that pilgrims follow when they go round the holy place.

The town is located between two hills. One hill is whitish and is associated with Brahma, and the other one is dark and associated with Vishnu. On the Brahma Hill, Shriji Mandir, the main temple of Barsana, is located. Sri Lali Lal (which means beloved daughter and son) is another name of Radha Krishna. They are the main deities of the temple.

Four peaks of the hill are the four heads of Brahma. According to Padma Purana, when Brahma wanted to serve personally Radha and Krishna, he took the form of Barsana hills. Other hills of Barsana host the Maan Mandir, where Radharani stays in the mood of Maan (anger) and Mor (Mayur) Kutir, where Krishna becomes peacock to pacify Her.

Maan Mandir built in the 18th century is located. Over 200 steps lead to the temple, and the viewpoint of the temple offers a splendid view to Barsana and its outskirts.



DAY 8

November 1, Friday

Parikrama around Govardhan. Satsang on the Bhagavad Gita with Swami Chidananda. Om-Chanting. Celebration of Diwali at Shree Giridhar Dham, Lakshmi Puja, fireworks.



Govardhan

A large part of His life, Krishna has spent in Vraj. Here thousands of years ago He was playing His beautiful leelas. One of the most significant events described in the Bhagavat Purana is the Mount-Govardhan-leela. Govardhan is located in the center of Vraj.

Based on the Srimad Bhagavatam, cowherds and farmers went to Govardhan to perform worshiping rituals for Indra - the god of rain. But Krishna did not approve it, because He wanted the villagers to worship the Supreme Lord Narayana and not the demigods. Indra got angry and has sent thunderstorms that were destroying the universe to wipe this place and all its inhabitants from the face of the earth. In order to protect people from this continuously pouring rain and thunderstorms, Sri Krishna raised hill Govardhan on His little finger and gave shelter to all the people and cattle of the city. After seven days of continuous storms, Indra conceded defeat.

After Krishna protected the inhabitants of Vraj from the wrath of Indra, he counselled them to worship Govardhan Hill which they did through puja and a parikrama around the hill. Govardhan is one of the key places of pilgrimage to Vraj. Devotees of Lord Krishna make parikrama - walking around the holy hill. Over last five thousand years, the flow of pilgrims to Govardhan didn't dry up. There are a lot of amazing temples and places along this way, where Sri Krishna has left traces of His Divine presence.

The Govardhan Hill is shaped like a peacock and that Radha Kund and Shyam Kund are its eyes. Dan Ghati and Mansi Ganga are its long neck. Mukharavinda is the mouth, Kusum Sarovar its face, and Panchari is its back and tail feathers. A peacock often curves its neck and puts his head under its stomach. The Govardhan Hill is thus shaped in this pose of a peacock.

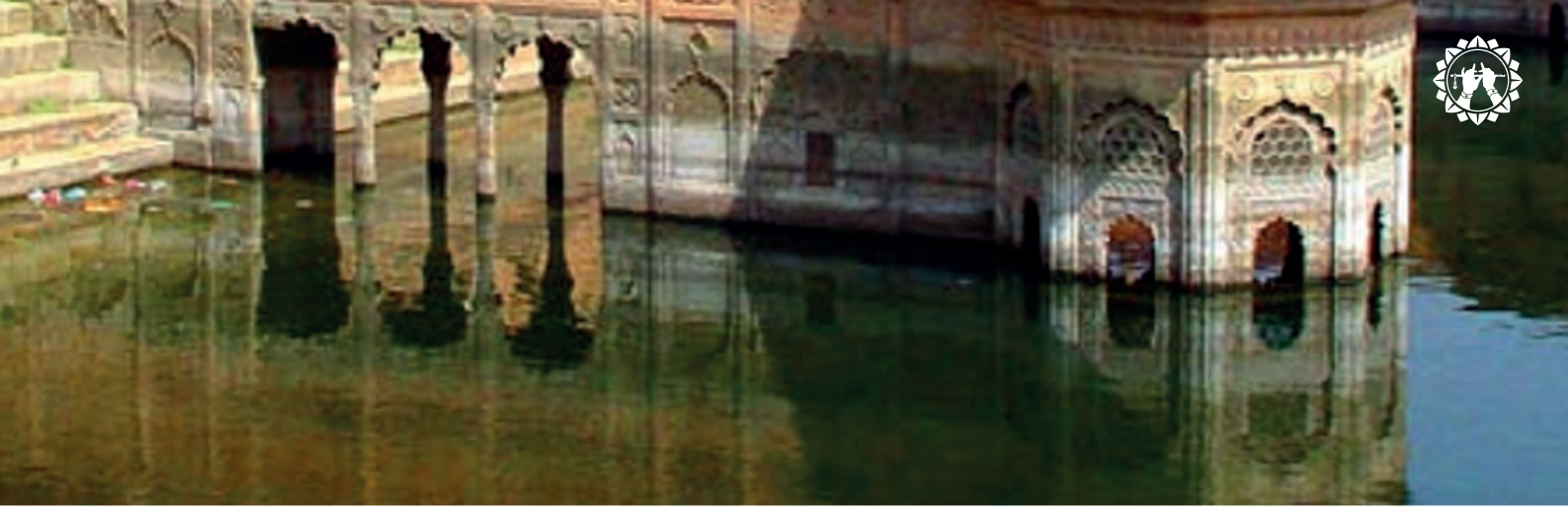


Govardhan Hill has immense spiritual importance among the devotees of Lord Krishna. People from all over the world come to circle around (Parikrama) the 21 km track.

Presently at its highest point, the Govardhan hill is just 25m high and is a wide hill. It is a narrow sandstone hill known as Giriraj which is about 8 km in length.

Govardhan Leela of the Lord is described in Srimad Bhagavatam, Canto 10, Chapters 24-27





Kusum Sarovar

Here are the feet of Krishna. The name of the temple complex is translated from Sanskrit as 'the lake of flowers'. This is a place, where gopis used to collect flowers for puja, and Krishna was disturbing them with His pranks, causing a storm of irritation, delight, love and joy in their hearts.

In front of the temple, there is a kund of extraordinary depth. Some believe that it has no bottom, while others claim that its depth is 60 metres. Large turtles live here, which are called great sages. They lived in Kusum Sarovar for centuries, meditating on the pastimes of Radha and Krishna.

Once upon a time, there was a quarrel between Krishna and Srimati Radharani over flowers. Krishna sneaked up behind Radha and scared Her, causing Radha to drop the flowers She had collected for puja. She became angry with Her Kanha exclaiming, 'I wanted to offer these flowers, but now they are unclean and there is no time to go to the Yamuna to wash them!' Then Krishna made a hole in the ground with His flute, water rushed there, and Kusum Sarovar was formed. Here, by this lake, Srimati Radharani and Krishna meet secretly in the morning time.



Govinda Kund

Govinda Kund is located on the outskirts of Aanyor village at the foot of Govardhan Hill. At this place, Indra performed abhishekam to Lord Krishna and offered prayers to Him after the Lord lifted Govardhan Hill and Indra realised his mistake. During the abhishekam, a ceremony to name Krishna 'Govinda' took place. Govinda means 'protector of cows, shepherd who brings happiness to cows, the Earth and the entire creation'. Sri Vajranabha, the great-grandson of Krishna, built a kund here in memory of this lila.

All the demigods participated in this incredibly magnificent ceremony. The heavenly cow Surabhi washed Sri Hari with her milk. Lord Brahma was the chief priest and Lord Shiva also came to give his blessings. After the demigods completed their worship, they offered obeisances to the Lord and returned to their respective abodes. While Krishna remained sitting in this place completely alone. It happened that during the worship, a few cowherd boys were passing by looking for their cows. They watched the entire ceremony, and after the demigods left, they saw their dear friend sitting alone on a very beautiful throne. The boys found puja items left by the demigods nearby, so they decided to repeat what they had just seen. They began to fan Him, offer incense and lamps, and sing hymns, imitating the demigods.



At that time, Nanda Maharaj, Krishna's father, was also passing by and saw Krishna with the boys. He asked where all these luxurious puja items came from and what was happening there. The boys responded: 'We were looking for our cows, came here and saw something incredible! There was such a beautiful cow here! And she was talking to Krishna and bathed Him in her milk! There was so much milk! And then we saw this man with thousands of eyes on his body offering his obeisances! And another man with four heads and many other beautiful people offering their prayers to our friend. We also saw a huge elephant pouring water from the Ganges from its trunk on Krishna! And then they all left, and Krishna was left here all alone with all these items nearby..'

When the demigods looked down and saw this, they were ashamed and at the same time joyful at the sight of such devotion, such simple and spontaneous love of these cowherd boys. They realised that the actions of the gopas were incomparably more devotional than their own. Seeing these little children worshipping Krishna with such pure love, the demigods began to dance and sing, worshipping the feet of the cowherd boys of Vrindavan.





Radha and Shyama Kunds

Radha Kund and Shyam Kund - Sacred bathing place of Srimati Radharani and Sri Krishna.

Kunds are situated on the parikrama road around the Govardhan Hill and are considered to be the holiest places on earth for all Vaishnavas.

Radha Kund appeared after Lord Krishna killed the demon Aristasura. Radharani rebuked Krishna, saying that He became impure by killing a bull, the symbol of religion. She suggested that He could get purified by taking bath in the holy rivers of all sacred places.

Krishna immediately shoved His Lotus Foot into the ground, making a large hole, and called all the sacred rivers to enter into it. They appeared before Him and formed Shyam Kund.

In a competitive mood, Radharani, along with some of Her gopi friends, broke their bangles and dug a hole with the broken pieces. But there was no water - so Krishna laughed. Later all the sacred rivers again arrived in person and requested permission to enter into Radharani's Kund, which they did after receiving Radharani's blessing.

DAY 9

November 2, Saturday

Celebration of Govardhana Puja.

Yamuna boat trip and evening arati of Yamuna-devi





Yamuna-devi

Yamuna is the daughter of Surya, the sun god, and Sanjna, the cloud goddess. She is also the twin sister to Yama, the god of death. Sanjna could not stand the sun heat and dazzling radiance of her husband and closed her eyes in his presence. Surya said that their son would be known as Yama.

After that, Sanjna did her best to keep her eyes open; however, she could not help blinking, and Surya again said that her daughter would be Yamuna. As Sanjna was trying to keep her eyes open, Yamuna was blessed to be worshipped as a goddess and remembered in all times.

Yamuna-devi plays an important role in early lilas of Lord Krishna. When Vasudeva, Krishna's father, took his newborn son from Mathura to a safe place, he crossed Yamuna by foot. Vasudeva was praying to Yamuna-devi to give way to him, but she raised her waters higher and higher instead. Finally, when he was seized with fear that they would drown with little Krishna together, Yamuna touched the Foot of Sri Hari and moved back that same moment. That was the first time when she touched Him.

Scriptures explain the dark color of Yamuna and her second name Kalindi. Srimad Bhagavatam (Canto 10, Chapters 16 and 17) narrates about a thousand-headed serpent Kaliya hiding in Yamuna's waters, in the fear of being eaten by Garuda, Sriman Narayana's vahana. His venom and the venom of his numerous family immediately contaminated the water, and it became black. No one dared to enter it or even come close to the river. The wind started carrying around the smallest drops of water from the river, and everything alive started dying around it. This made Yamuna-devi very sad.

At that time, Sri Krishna jumped into the river. Kaliya started pouring streams of venom on Him, irritated that his rest had been disturbed. Sri Krishna was dancing on his hoods inflated with anger. When any head of the serpent dared to rise, Gopal kicked it with His Lotus Foot.



Kaliya was saved from death by his wives, who began to pray to Krishna, and Krishna told the entire Naag family to move to the ocean. When Kaliya was preoccupied with the fact that the waters of the holy river would not protect him anymore, and Garuda would for sure eat him in the ocean, Krishna said that, as of that moment, there would be footprints of His Lotus Feet on each of the snake's heads, and no one would dare to touch Kaliya. After that, Yamuna-devi's wish to participate in sweet lilas of Lord Krishna came true, and she remained dark to be the same color as her beloved Krishna.

The first 16 years of His life, Lord Krishna spent on the shores of Yamuna, playing with Radha and the gopis in her waters and grazing cows on her shores.

Srimad Bhagavatam (Canto 10, Chapter 58) says that once, when He already was the King of Dwaraka, Krishna visited His cousins, the Pandavas, in their capital Indraprastha located on the shore of Yamuna. So, Krishna and Arjuna, the middle brother from the five Pandavas, were walking in the forest and decided to go to Yamuna to bathe in it. There, they saw a beautiful young girl. Krishna asked Arjuna to find out who she was and invite her over to Them. The girl told Arjuna that her name was Kalindi (another name of Yamuna-devi), that she was the daughter of Surya and lived in a house built by her father there on the river. Kalindi also said she had been performing penance to become the wife of Maha Vishnu, and would not leave that place until the Lord Himself would come for her. Arjuna conveyed this message to Krishna, and the Lord, satisfied by the penance of the beautiful girl, fulfilled her wish and made her His wife.

Yamuna is the main tributary of the Ganga River. Once Yamuna was encircling Vrindavan, but today it only touches it, leaving numerous dried ancient ghats on both shores. Pilgrims still come to these ancient ghats and cover their heads with sand, which is considered equal to bathing in Yamuna. Around Vrindavan, there is not a single stone in Yamuna. Its bottom is extremely soft and warm. Here, her love to Lord Krishna became so hot that it melted everything it touched, even stones.



Keshi Ghat

Keshi Ghat is a famous ghat located in the North-Eastern part of Vrindavan. Here, Lord Krishna killed the Keshi-demon in the form of a giant horse. This is one of the most popular bathing places in Vrindavan. Every evening, an arati to Yamuna-devi is held here.





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GST: 09AAVFB5794R1Z2
PAN: AAVFB5794R
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Ground floor, 383 Sheetal Chaya,
Raman Reti road,
Vrindavan, 281121
E-mail: PVindiaadventures@bhaktib.in
<https://bhaktib.in/>