

Braja Raja

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"BRAJA RAJA" (RHYMES WITH FUDGE FUDGE), THE DUST OF GOD'S REALM, IS A MONTHLY DEVOTED TO GRACE.

Shri Vallabhacharya

The setting is Gokul, a town in Braja, Krishna's birthplace, where Shri Vallabhacharya, the founder of the Path of Grace is wondering how to reunite souls with their Lord.

The rays of the afternoon sun diminish; the atmosphere cools as the rippling waters of the Yamuna River mingle with sandal forest breezes. Singing birds and the rattle of young leaves awaken joy in the heart. Passing by the Brahmachokar tree, Shri Vallabhacharya with his disciple Damala reach the banks of the Yamuna, her pure dark water, the embodiment of grace. Devotional songs softly fill the air of Gokul. Devotees absorbed in perfect mood narrate to each other Krishna's divine sportings. Bliss surges the surroundings; it is seen everywhere.

Suddenly a delicate voice calls like a chorus of gods, melodiously singing the glories of the eternal realm. "Precious Gokul, splendid Gokul, the Lord's eye."

Shri Vallabhacharya peacefully listens on the calm banks to the lyrical invocation and says, "Look, Damala, what a divine abode. If true joy is not found here in the land of Krishna, where will it be found? He abounds with the charm and beauty of a billion love gods.

"Gokul fills the hearts of the Gopis, the milk maids of this sacred land. Here black bees hum and imbibe the Lord's nectar form. They hover about from forest to grove chanting His name. They drink the sweetness of His lotus-like countenance, the origin of bliss."

Damala gazes at his teacher as he listens to these brilliant words and feels a unity with everything. He

considers, " Vallabh is lost in sublime contemplation of his beloved for this is indeed the Lord's abode. It is long since he has rested."

All of the other disciples calmly wait while their guru's eyes search the unknown. Damodardas's loyalty prompts him repeatedly to urge his teacher to rest. Vallabh, knowing the bhaktas's heart, speaks, "Damala, these ghats (steps leading down to the river) are enchanting, exquisite. This place automatically brings the heart to Krishna. But I have one question about this area. As one can not separate the Lord from His consort, how can we know which of these two adjoining ghats is Govinda Ghat and which is Thakurani Ghat?"

Damala is silent. He wonders in which "lila", (divine sport) the knower of Krishna's heart was lost.

Suddenly from one side Vallabh hears anklets ring, like a hoard of buzzing black bees. An unusual musical phrase reverberates with the intoxicating sweetness of a vina , all its strings in perfect harmony. Then a voice calls, " Mahaprabhu , Vallabh , what were you thinking? "

Vallabh beholds the divine form of the river Yamuna completely ornamented holding a lotus garland in her hand. Her form, is dark like a rain-filled cloud. Vallabh's joy is boundless and exclaims, "My eyes are sated by your ineffable beauty. You, Krishna's consort, have showered your grace upon me and allowed me your sight."

The vision of her form carries him away in a flood of love. Tears of joy welling in his eyes drops seem like a pearl necklace offered to his Lord. In a spontaneous gesture, both of his hands join together indicating the union of separated souls. He sings,

"Shri Yamuna, all divine powers granted by thee."

Myriad voices follow before he continues, "I bow to Krishna's beloved Shri Yamuna."

Everyone praises the river, "Glories to the daughter of the sun."

"Yamuna, daughter of the Sun, why did you call me Mahaprabhu? I do not deserve such a noble title." Vallabhacharya asks.

She replies, "Vallabh, I was serious, you are Mahaprabhu, a great soul."

He hesitates and then humbly submits "Goddess, I am only a servant of the Lord. It is contrary to your noble

stature to call me Mahaprabhu."

Yamuna bursts into laughter. "No, Vallabh, you have appeared for the sole purpose of removing the affliction of the Lord's heart and to unite divine souls with the all-liberating Lord. You are Mahaprabhu, truly great."

All present become forgetful of their material existence, beholding her unrivalled benevolence.

Vallabhacharya submits humbly, "O Yamuna, you create love for the Lord. Please tell, which of these ghats is Govinda and which Thakurani?"

Yamuna, who removes the sorrow of all beings, cannot bear to see Vallabh's dismay. With a gentle smile she begins explaining, "I have appeared to show this to you. The ghat over there with the Shami tree where you are standing is Thakurani ghat. The area between the town of Ravala and that ghat is the place where the Lord's consort divinely sports. On your left is Govinda ghat. From there to the Mahavana forest is the playground of our beloved dark-hued Krishna. You have chosen to sit here on the Thakurani ghat, an appropriate place for contemplation."

Saying thus, the goddess gently smiles and disappears in a lovely ripple of water. In the boundless sky the gods praise,

"Oh Yamuna, daughter of the sun,
all sins of those who daily sing this prayer
will be burned away.
Shri Krishna's love with them will stay."

Vallabh, the master of speech, repeats the divine invocation with his lotus-like speech. His disciples follow. After a few moments of silence, Vallabhacharya speaks elated, "Damala, did you observe how generous and kind Yamuna is? Because of my question about these two ghats she appeared. Let us sit here and contemplate, sing and hear about the lilas of Shri Yamunaji's grace-filled Lord. This is our greatest fortune."

Damala and the other disciples pray silently before returning to their work.

The melody of praise fills the four directions. The women of Braja stroll out in the evening in small groups to glance at the divine river. They sing sweetly, "See how the Lord's crown sways."

Elderly people and groups of saints come to have

the purifying sight of Acharya Vallabh. Joy fills all hearts. A fresh ambience envelops the town. The divine mystery astonishes all.

The glories of the guru are heard everywhere. From morning to night auspicious songs repel all ignorance. All hearts swell with the love of God, the source of all joy. All souls are submerged in devotional love. Celestial words fill the air:

"With joy I bow to Shri Yamunaji.

All divine powers are granted by thee."

(to be continued)

Waves in His Ocean

GOSWAMY SHYAM MANOHAR SPEAKS AT INDORE

In this age of dharma, devotion is inherent to man's nature. Until this quality becomes manifest, full human potential remains unknown. This is Shri Mahaprabhu Vallabhacharya's vision.

Buddha had his own theory, concluding that the soul is an idea born out of ignorance. He preached, "I do not exist."

His and other paths have dealt with the problems of the ego. Naturally, in Buddha's philosophy there is no scope for "me and mine". Yet, I cannot help but see the contradiction that if I am not, then who is saying so? It is difficult to grasp this completely with mind and heart. Actually, the problem is with the ego and not whether we exist or not. In fact, Buddha however felt that no firm conclusion could be made about the soul.

Ego, when it appears negatively in our lives in the forms of anger and lust, creates problems. As this malady of "me and mine" is cured, life becomes wholesome. The Path of Knowledge does not agree with the Buddhist doctrine that "I don't exist". Instead it seeks to offer its sense of self to the Supreme Brahman by saying, "I am Brahman". Through this practice it is possible that the anger and pride in our lives can be removed, but the following story brings to mind what often happens.

When the automobile was first brought to India, the king of Jaipur purchased one. As he was about to embark on a public drive, one of his officials objected,

"How can the king of Jaipur think of riding in a vehicle that is not drawn by four horses? It is not the practice of royalty."

Agreeing, the king replied, "Then tie four horses to the car."

When this was attempted, the driver, an Englishman objected, "This car has enough horsepower of its own. Why are you attaching these animals?"

The king rebuked, "This is not a question of horsepower, but of royal status," and the four horses were lashed to the vehicle.

As it turns out, the car, which was a Rolls Royce, was not able to move with the horses standing in its way, nor were the horses strong enough to budge the car. Both means became useless.

Those who use the vehicle of knowledge improperly fall into a similar situation. While repeating the sacred mantra, "I am Brahman," the emphasis, instead of falling upon "Brahman", lands upon "I". Brahman is no longer important. The vehicle of knowledge becomes like the king's Rolls which was tied up with four status symbol horses. The sacrifice of I-ness to Brahman ends up nourishing the false ego and keeps the striver from the realization that "I am Brahman" and the natural development of the positive ego.

The false ego cannot know the extent of Brahman, that It can measure everything. One can know the world by using Brahman as his rule. Brahman can become matter, but matter cannot become Brahman. Science says this world is made of atoms. This may be true but Brahman is the measure of the atom, the smallest as well as the greatest, beyond the atom's conception.

Some people, tired of their unsuccessful attempts at figuring the whole thing out, declare the entire creation to be mayic, an illusion. They claim, "No one knows the origin of creation."

When bliss attends our conception of creation, it is transformed into a divine play or lila. When incomprehensible, the world is scorned, like calling our mother "my father's woman," instead of "my mother". Although they are both the same person, the difference is in the attitude.

Shri Mahaprabhu Vallabhacharya advises us not to see our world as illusory but rather to respect it. How can a person appreciate a work of art if he doesn't

honor its creator? Similarly, how can people have any love of the Lord if they do not honor His Creation? Mahaprabhu told Surdas that instead of seeing himself as a sinner, he should stop whimpering and start glorifying the eternal creation of lila.

If maya exists, it is not evil, it is a part of His play. If you can't fathom it, then at least see that the maya you experience is within the lila emerging from the all-powerful Supreme. This attitude sprouts the seeds of bhakti.

Brahman can engulf everything, yet nothing is able to measure It. Philosophers realize this. If there is matter, there must be some controller. If there is maya, something must be supporting it, some indefinable consciousness. Vallabhacharya says there is no need to bring in any power of creation other than the Supreme. The flow of existence comes from and is all Brahman, one without a second. He has become everything and plays in an endless assortment of forms. The extent of this play cannot be calculated.

That supreme Brahman has been referred to in the scriptures in various ways, "I am Brahman", "You are That", "It is all Atma". Within Brahman there are no differences: duality is something imagined. Yet, Brahman is as omnipresent and diversified as the different creatures living upon the earth. Everything exists within It in harmony. False ego creates the illusion of selfishness. When the false ego affirms, "I am Brahman", its true meaning is lost.

Brahman is the meaning of all things. Madhava Acharya has beautifully explained that even the meaning of the roaring ocean is Brahman. All names and forms are His.

Pondering the vastness of His ocean, the insignificance of the ego is known. Although we can't cross the entire ocean of Brahman, we can enjoy with great relish the movements of Its waves. Don't think that in a small raft of ego, "I can cross", for even if you did manage, it is simply like getting a passport but no visa to land on the other side. If you want to meet the Lord the following story sets the way.

Once, Emperor Akbar, desirous of meeting God, asked Shri Vitthalnathji for the solution. He replied, "If I wanted to meet with you, a great ruler, how difficult it would be. First I would have to pass by so many gates

and guards, and then through countless ministers and still I would not be assured of an audience with you. But, if you wanted to meet with me, it would become very easy to see you. So it is with the Lord."

He is everything, everywhere, and can manifest in any situation. We wander here and there with success and failure while He has nowhere to go yet appears in amazing form. Brahman cannot be realized through ego, so proceed carefully when saying, "I am Brahman." The concern should be with God.

Shankaracharya explains that when the difference of "You" and "I" is destroyed, I becomes Yours. It is not proper to say You are mine. A wave cannot be the ocean, but the ocean can be a wave. The individual soul can not be Brahman but It creates waves of different souls. The soul cannot fathom Brahman yet Brahman is the waves in the ocean.

To see the individual self with true feeling of I-ness, floating within the divine ocean, is called Knowledge of the Lord's Greatness. Bhakti exists when this knowledge is linked with constant and overwhelming love. Knowing the wave's nature, He is known, love fills the heart. The soul becomes a wave in the sea of nectar. When we realize that we have forgotten that ocean, a great desire surges. This nourishes the seed of love and then bhakti appears. Devotion occurs in all beings when they realize their natural forms as the ocean's waves. When the wave starts thinking it is the ocean, it simply breaks upon the shore. The ocean continues forever. The waves of our understanding can merge with the Supreme, but the Lord never merges. He simply is, yet appears in the countless waves in the ocean. To see one's true form is devotion's first step and when you feel that you are the Lord's, only then are you are entitled to say "You are mine."

A poet sings in that mood.

"Don't go elsewhere;
remain in my palace.
Whatever You desire
I will perform....
Says the poet Chaturbihari
the service of the Lord
is natural."

This type of devotion is achieved through love , never through pride. When you feel with love that the Lord is yours, great joy arises. Devotion affirms, "I am your wave, You are my ocean."

In this state all sense of my-ness is merged in the ocean, purified. The true "me and mine" can now manifest. Then, the enemies, lust and anger, are removed. This sense of mine, so unpleasing in the mundane, becomes a lovely force.

Some still claim that " I am not" but Mahaprabhu enlightens, do not fear to call the Lord your own. Because you are weak you are unable to deal with the world and have to renounce it. If this weakness passes, one becomes balanced. It is unnecessary to amputate a limb which can be cured. Why kill the ego? Heal the self. As soon as you try to remove the ego, a contradiction occurs, that I am not , yet the I remains. Simply claiming that "I am Brahman", cannot do it. The remedy is being His follower and reconciling oneself with Brahman. This constitutes a healthy sense of I and is the form of Bhakti in the Path of Grace. Thank you.

Rasakhan

Rasakhan was a well-known Muslim Krishna devotee. He lived in the 16th century and wrote some of the finest Braja Bhasa poetry. A story is told about him in his days before worshipping the Lord. He was extremely attached to a very handsome Hindu boy. Wherever the child wandered, Rasakhan would follow for he could not bear a moment's separation.

Some devotees of Krishna, observing his intense attachment to the lad commented to each other, "Imagine if his attachment to God were as strong as to that boy , what a great saint he would be."

Overhearing their remarks, he approached them and questioned, "What were you saying?"

At first they concealed their thoughts but when Rasakhan implored, they conceded. Rasakhan immediately asked, "What does the Lord look like?"

Upon seeing a painting of Lord Krishna,
the poet's heart fell in love with His divine
beauty. Rasakhan spent the remainder of his
life in the area of Braja, Krishna's
playground, singing His praises. One of the
most original and inspired saint-poets of his
time, he overflows with mood and sings...

While some ramble from shrine to shrine
another reads a thousand scriptures.
Others prefer mantra or austerities;
some get caught in the perfect trance.

If one observes carefully
proclaims Rasakhan,
it is seen they are great fools
wandering aimlessly.

Only they who
joyfully offer themselves
to Lord Gopal
know the real truth.

In this world of samsara
listen to all
but don't say a thing
Perform with faith your
vows and practices
They will carry you across
your heart's ocean.

Meet all with no enmity,
remain in the light
of pure association.

Rasakhan reveals:
The Lord's worship should be natural
like the woman who effortlessly balances
jugs on her head
as she continues on her way.

If a man I am born

declares Raskhan
a cowlad let me be
among Krishna's friends.

If a beast I am born
a cow let me be
that roams amidst
Krishna's herd.

If a rock I am born
let me be that rock
Krishna upheld
to ward off Indra's rains.

If a bird I am born
O let me reside
on a Kadam tree branch
by Yamuna's banks.

Shiva and the gods
repeat his name;
the wise contemplate him
to increase dharma.
Even the fool
who takes Him into his heart
the smallest bit
becomes a knower of divine mood.

Rasakhan says,
My Lord is the cowlad
who dances for his devotees
for a glass of buttermilk.
(translations by Stephen Schaffer)

Nature of Grace

By Shri Harirayaji with a commentary by Lalu Bhattji
Translation by Shyamdas

Shri Hariraya was a distinguished lineage
holder in the Path of Grace about 250 years

ago. His writings have a refreshing balance of devotion and philosophy. He has also written a number of poems in Braja Bhasa, Gujarati, Punjabi, and Sanskrit. He passed 125 years on this earth and was a living example of a grace. Lalubhattji, appearing several years after him, devoted his life to study, worship, and literary activities. His clear style makes his writings some of the most lucid work on devotion

Harirayaji: "Where the absence of all means is the means to achieve the fruit and where the fruit is the means, know that to be the Blessed Path of Grace."

Lalubhattji: In the tenth canto of the Bhagavata we see that the Lord was achieved by the maidens of Braja when they started to weep humbly. At that point they had renounced all means of finding Him, such as singing His praises. Here, Harirayaji does not want the absence of means to be taken as the means to achieve the Lord and therefore says, "Where the fruit is the means, know that to be the Blessed Path of Grace."

The Lord is the reward of all efforts and to receive that reward, the effort lies in the Lord Himself.

Harirayaji: "Where wordly and scriptural achievements are accomplished through the Lord's grace alone, and never through the devotee's effort, know that to be the Blessed Path of Grace."

Lalubhattji: Exactly how the devotees of Braja attained the eternal realm without any effort is described by the Creator Brahma in the Bhagavata, "Although the people of Braja pass their night in deep sleep and days in toiling work, He will take them to the eternal abode." (2/7/31)

If one makes efforts without relying on the Lord, he or she is confronted with obstacles.

Harirayaji: "Where the Lord accepts the soul without considering its qualification etc. nor does He delay, know that to be the Blessed Path of Grace."

Lalubhattji: Although scripture confines the eligibility of liberation to mankind, the Bhagavata proves Harirayaji's passage in the following line, "The maidens of Braja, cows, birds, as well as the deer reached the Lord only through divine attachment."

(Bhagavata 11/12/8)

Harirayaji: "Where relationship is both the means and achievement and is established according to Krishna's sweet desire, know that to be the Blessed Path of Grace."

Lalubhattji: Where the body and sentimental relationships with the Lord are the means to achieve the fruit and where the union of all the senses with the Lord is the achievement, that is the Pure Blessed Path of Grace. Vallabhacharya says in this context in his Subodhini, "To have chit-chat, sight and association etc. with the Lord is the fruit of life." The relationship is established due to the Lord's desire for His devotees. The Bhagavata explains, "They know nothing besides Me nor do I know anything besides them."

Harirayaji: "Where, in devotion no reciprocation from God is expected and where the divine sentiment is nourished, know that to be the Pure Blessed Path of Devotion."

Lalubhattji: Where the worshipper does not think of any reward for his services to the Lord and where the nourishment of the devotee's divine attachment is accomplished by the Lord Himself, it is the Pure Blessed Path. Krishna raised the Govardhana Hill to transfer the worship in Braja from other gods towards Himself in order to increase the divine devotional attachment.

Harirayaji: "Where humility is the singular means for the Lord's manifestation and the humility aroused in separation is the fruit, know that to be the Blessed Path of Devotion."

Lalubhattji: The humility which arises due to the difficulty and over-eagerness for His union is a minor reward worthy of request. Separation makes one humble while union makes one prideful. That humility which results in the Lord's manifestation is worthy of being requested and is the fruit. In this context, Shri Gokulnathji says, "Oh Lord of Radha (Krishna) bless me with humility so that I may attain You."

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