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The Concept of Love

by Vaisnavacharya Chandan Goswami

"Your task is not to seek for love, but merely to seek and find all the barriers within yourself that you have built against it." – Rumi

Society has changed our understanding of the concept of love. In a so-called "loving" relationship between two people, the greatest thing that either partner can offer is their body, which means that the physical aspect plays a huge part. The connection starts with attraction and transforms into a physical union. This is not the nature of pure love. Every worldly relationship starts with the words: "I love you". But in reality, even a proposal for marriage really means, "I love myself. Will you marry me?"



We pursue worldly relationships in order to fulfil our needs and desires. "I love myself" is the undertone in all our relationships, and thus we tend to approach God in the same manner: "I love myself. Please give me what I desire." But this is not how love works. We have to focus on transforming the "I" into "you"; to try and fulfil our Beloved's desires instead of our own. We can only experience true love when this transformation takes place.



Blessed to Live in this Divine Forest of Vrindavan

Shah Kundan Lal, Shri "Lalit Kishori"

Kundan Lal Shah and his younger brother Phundan Lal were born in the early 1800s CE to a wealthy Shah of Lucknow, and their entire family were disciples of the Goswamis from the Radharaman Temple, Vrindavan. By Shriji's blessings, the brothers were devotees from childhood.

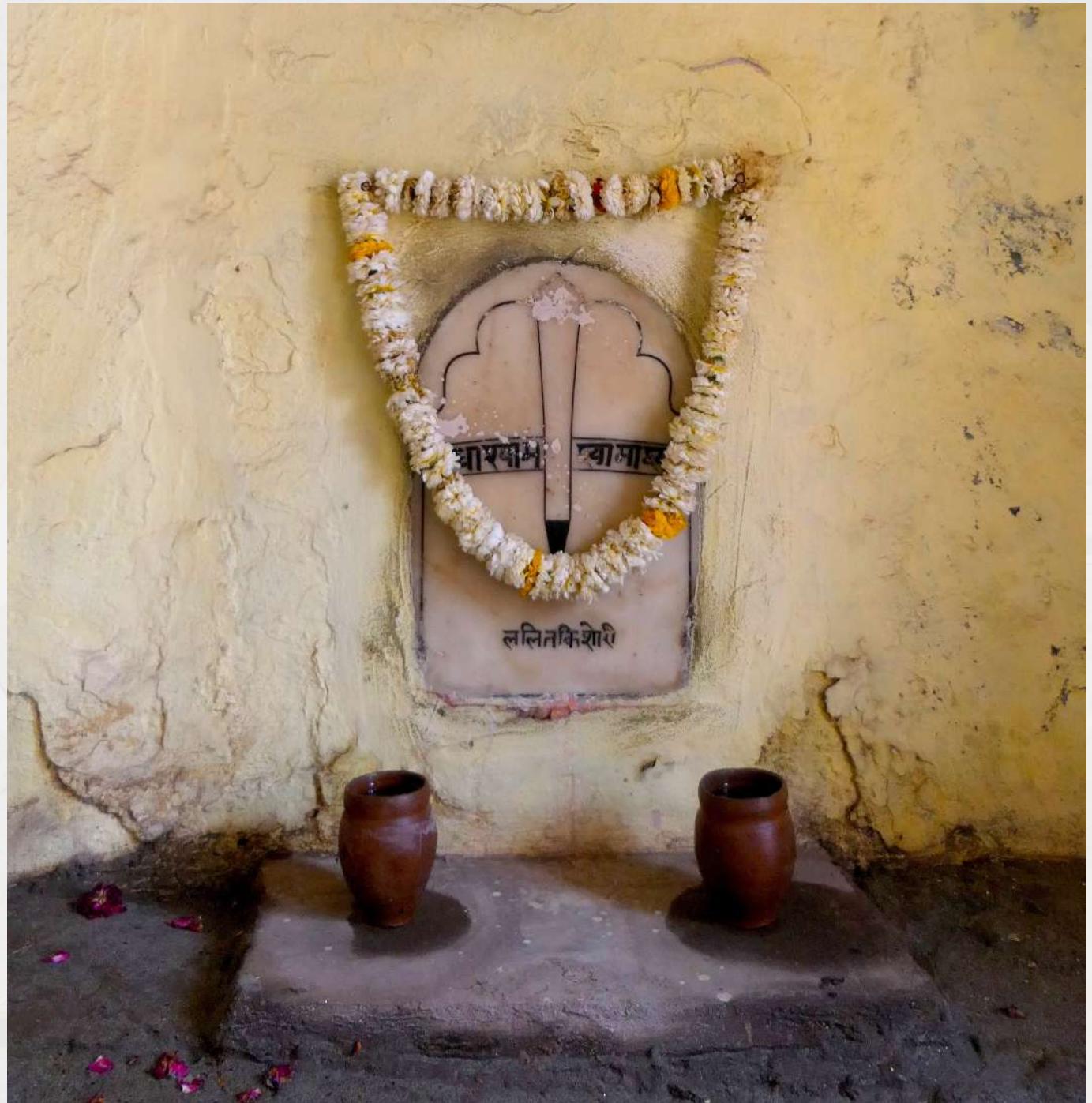
Their grandfather, Bihari Lal Shah, loved to serve Radharamanji in any way possible, and he funded the building of the temple where Radharamanji currently lives. One day, he asked Kundan Lal and his brother to take a beautiful golden throne to Shriji. This was Kundan Lal and Phundan Lal's first trip to Vrindavan, and after seeing the divine land, they extended their stay from a few days to a whole month, taking this chance to visit all the holy places in Braj. They never wanted to leave, but due to family responsibilities, they had to return to Lucknow.

Soon after, their grandfather Bihari Lalji left his body, followed by their father and mother. The

brothers felt sad to lose their dearest ones. However, by the power of devotion, their calm nature kept them completely focussed throughout the grieving process, and each moment of their day was spent in Shriji's *bhajan* and *seva*.

Around this time, two great saints, Shri Gunmanjari Das Goswami and their guru, Shri Radha-Govind Goswami, who belonged to the Radharaman Temple lineage, visited the Shah brothers' home. After receiving their blessings, the brothers were able to tie up their family affairs and move to Vrindavan permanently.

Upon arriving, Shah Kundan Lal and his brother stopped just outside the boundary of Braj. They removed their shoes, and from this day, they would never wear them again. They started living in Patnimal Kunj near Radharamanji's temple, but later, Shah Kundan Lal built his own residence called Lalit Nikunj, better known as Shahji Mandir, next to Nidhivan.



Shah Kundan Lal's Samadhi

Shah Kundan Lal gave up his vast wealth for the treasure of Radharamanji's seva. He loved the dust of Braj (Braj *raj*) so much that he would order clay pots from outside of Braj, urinate or defecate directly into them, and then have them carried back outside of Braj for disposal. He never wasted *prasad* or let it go bad. He also never set foot outside of Braj,

nor did he allow even a photograph or drawing of himself to be taken out of Braj. Shah Kundan Lal was highly educated, as was his brother Phundan Lal. They were both poets. Shah Kundan Lal wrote beautiful songs for Radharamanji under the name "Lalit Kishori", and Phundan Lal used the name "Lalit Madhuri."

The following song is a piece by Shah Kundan Lal:

जब श्री बनवास मिल्यो सजनी तब तीरथ आन गए न गए
जब लाड़िली लाल कौ नाम लियो तब नाम न आन लए न लए
पदकंज किशोरिहि चित्त पग्यो तब पायन आन नए न नए
जब नैन लगे मनमोहन सौं तब औगुन आन भए न भए

*jab shri banwaas milyo sajani tab teerath aan gaye na gaye
jab laadili laal ko naam liyo tab naam na aan laye na laye
padkanj kishorihi chitt pagyo tab paayan aan naye na naye
jab nain lage manmohan saun tab augun aan bhaye na bhaye*

"When you are blessed to live in this divine forest of Vrindavan, what does it matter if you have visited any other holy place? When you have chanted the Name of Shri Radha and Krishn, who cares if you have ever called out anyone else's name or not? When your heart is absorbed in Radharani's lotus feet, what does it matter if you have bowed to anyone else? And when your eyes have drowned in Shri Radharaman's beauty, if you have any vices still left in you, it does not matter at all."

Once, Shah Kundan Lal allowed an infamous robber to stay at his home for several days in exchange for his promise to abstain from robbing or harming the people of Vrindavan. He was hiding from the British Government, who ruled the area at the time. Shah Kundan Lal was accused of betraying the British. The judge in the courthouse of Mathura asked him, "Why did you commit this crime?"

"Because he promised not to harm the Brajwasis if I did."



Shah Kundan Lal's *gopi swaroop*
(Shahji Mandir, Vrindavan)

"Do you know the punishment for this crime?"

"Yes, execution."

"You will be hanged!" said the judge, angrily.

Shah Kundan Lal smiled and said, "Then as my last wish, I only ask that you hang me in Vrindavan, with devotees singing *kirtan* all around me. If you do this, my death will not be a punishment, but a great blessing."

The judge was stunned by his words and asked, "Are you not afraid?"

In reply, Shah Kundan Lal sang a song, the meaning of which is, "When I am already wounded by the eyes of Govind, what fear have I of any sword?" The judge let him go.

In 1873 CE, just after Dusshera, Shah Kundan Lal got a seasonal fever and was sick for about ten days. Realising that the call from Radharani had come to enter *nitya lila*, he instructed his younger brother Phundan Lal to make a bed of *Braj raj* for him to lie on. Phundan Lal and other devotees began to sing Harinaam. Three pictures of Radharaman Lal were placed around him, so that no matter which way he looked, he would see Shriji everywhere. As the *kirtan* continued, sometimes he would raise his hands as if dancing, and sometimes he reached for the pictures as if he wished to go inside them. At around 3:30pm, he said "Radhe Shyam" four times, and entered *nitya lila* while immersed in Radharamanji's *darshan*.

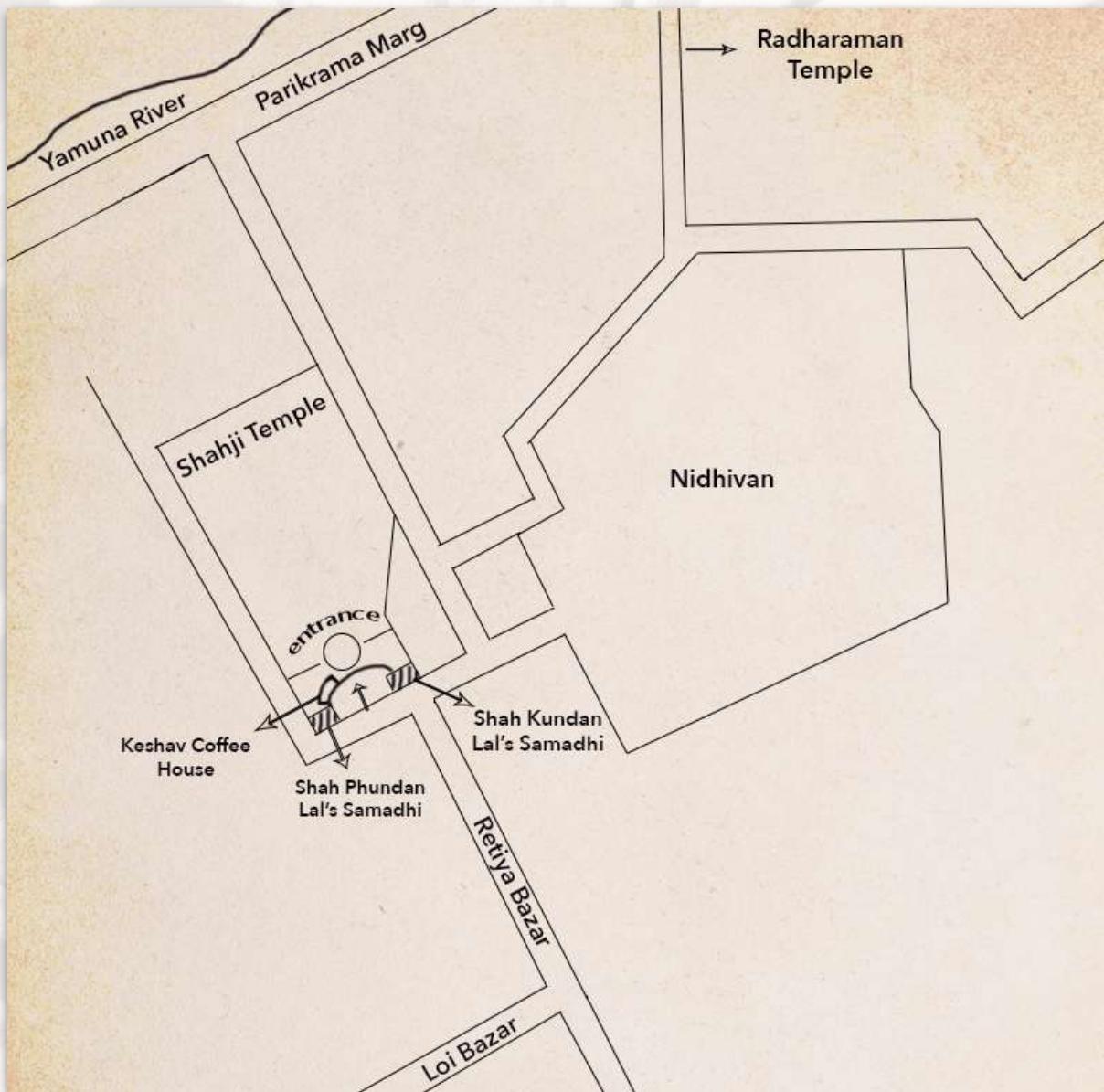
Shah Kundan Lal never rode in a cart or used

any other transportation whilst travelling on *Braj raj*. Similarly, he had requested that after his death, his body not be carried on a stretcher. And so, the devotees honoured his last wish. They spread soft sand from the Yamuna riverbank on the streets of Vrindavan, and gently dragged his body through it. Thousands of people followed behind him, rolling in the dust, touching his feet, and dancing. They took him on *parikrama* to all the main temples and finally reached Radharamanji's gate. There they stopped for some time. Shriji's *prasadi mala* and cloth were placed around Kundan Lal's neck, and his *prasad* was placed in Kundan Lal's mouth. From there, his body was placed in a tomb (*samadhi*).

You can visit the *samadhis* of Kundan Lal and Phundan Lal Shah, which are located within the structure of the Shahji Mandir's main gate. The temple deities of Radha-Raman who were worshipped by the brothers, still reside inside the temple. The Shah brothers also had a marble image of themselves and their family members made on the floor of the temple verandah, so that they would be decorated by the *Braj raj* from the feet of devotees who walked over them. And on the temple wall facing the deities, there are images of two *gopis*, which are the Shah brothers' forms in Eternal Vrindavan.

References:

Abhilash Madhuri by Shah Kundan Lal
Braj ke Bhakt by Dr. OBL Kapoor



Map of Shahji Mandir and the Shah Brothers' *samadhis*



A Brajwasi's Lathi

By an Anonymous Lali



It was my last day in Govardhan. Girirajji had already rendered me incapable of controlling my tears, and I was not ready to leave without receiving his *darshan* one last time. So, completely oblivious to the hidden gems that the foothills of Shri Giriraj would reveal that day, I set off along *parikarma marg*.

Being new to Braj, I had been firmly instructed by a few Brajwasis to take a *lathi* (a stick) with me every time I left the house, to deter any particularly mischievous monkeys that might be tempted to pester an easy target such as myself. So, I did exactly that.

It is at this point I must introduce one such Brajwasi who, blessed as I am, I have the privilege of calling my friend. We walked together that day; rather, she walked in front with the *lathi* and I followed closely behind to ensure that I was also within the bounds of its protection. Seemly benign, it soon occurred to me that this formation was, in itself, a gem of the most precious kind. As it is, having the good fortune to walk the same ground as countless devotees, covered in Braj *raj*, at the feet of Shri Giriraj must be (I have recently been taught) the result of some unquantifiable mercy, but to be presented with the honour of walking directly behind a beautifully devoted soul like my friend as she offered her footsteps in devotion, was simply the most abundantly blissful gift. Like a child, I grinned secretly to myself as I relished the sweetness of the moment.

In one particularly monkey-populated area, we came across a devotee offering *dandavati parikrama* who, to my surprise (and delight), paused briefly when he saw us. *Dandavati parikrama* is an act where the devotee bows all the way around Govardhan Hill; an act which can take several weeks to complete. New to the ways of devotion, my mind fails to comprehend how such an act is even possible; I was in a state of amazement. As it turned out, he was curious to know why we were carrying a five-foot *lathi*! Whilst my

friend exchanged a few words with him about monkeys and their naughtiness, I stood in silent awe, struck by the abundance of blissful energy with which he spoke despite being short of breath. The image of his exhausted, Braj-raj-covered face with the biggest beaming smile you've ever seen, remains firmly etched in my mind. In fact, every inch of his body was covered in Braj *raj*. How blessed he is and how fortunate we were to meet him.

Watching the monkeys running, jumping, playing on Shri Giriraj, I thought it ironic that we were carrying a *lathi* to fend off the very beings that Girirajji keeps so close. How dear they must be to him.

On reflection, I feel immense gratitude towards the monkeys' mischievous ways for bringing about the circumstances that allowed for these small, yet priceless gems to reveal themselves to a *lali* who has probably realised only a minute fraction of their exquisite nature.

