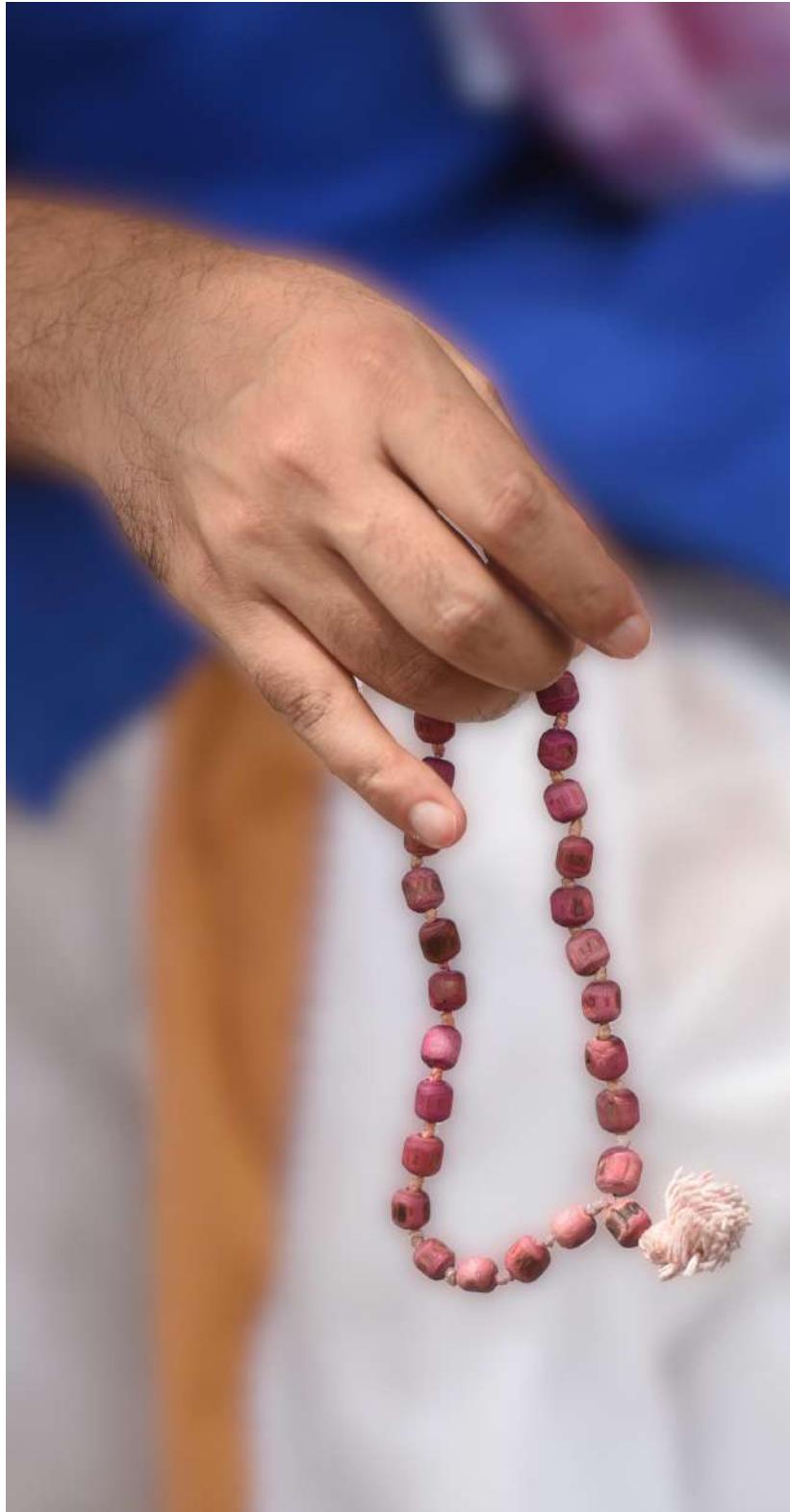




SANDARSHAN

odev108@gmail.com
www.shriradharaman.com

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The Path of Grace and Sadhan

There are two main paths to attain the Divine. One is a path of *kripa* or grace, and the other is a path of *sadhan* or spiritual practice. In the path of *kripa*, Shri Krishn's mercy, through the guru, removes all the obstacles in our spiritual life and takes away all the bad habits within us, a process which is called *anarth nivritti*. His mercy lifts us up into the stage of *bhav bhakti*, where the first ray of sacred love (*prem*) appears. On the other hand, the path of *sadhan* is where our own spiritual practice makes us move forward.

Many spiritual schools emphasise either the path of *kripa* or the path of *sadhan*. But in Gaudiya Vaishnavism, our acharyas have taught that we need both *kripa* and *sadhan* to attain Eternal Vrindavan.

We can understand this by a simple analogy. Imagine you are stuck at the bottom of a dark well, and you desperately want to escape. So you cry out, "Krishn, help me!" This is *sadhan*. Then Krishn comes and sends down his rope of mercy to rescue you. This is grace. The next step is very important. Now that Krishn has sent you the rope of his grace, you need to grab that rope and hold on tight. Then Krishn will pull you out.

Sometimes *kripa* comes to us, but we are not in the right mindset to hold on to that mercy. Though Krishn may be showering his mercy on us, if we are not stable in our spiritual practice, that *kripa* won't work on us. It's like when someone gives us food, we still need to use our hands to eat and nourish ourselves.

In the same way, if you want to attain Vrindavan, you need a mixture of both *kripa* and *sadhan*. Nowadays, I see devotees depending more on their own efforts or *sadhan*, without the right understanding of *kripa*'s magic touch.

Once Krishn's mother Yashoda tried to bind him with a rope after finding him stealing butter. However, because of Krishn's innate power to get whatever he desires automatically (*satya sankalp shakti*), the rope Yashoda used was always two fingers too short. Yashoda used all the string in her house to make the rope longer; she even used the ribbons from her hair. But no matter what, the rope was always too short.

*sva-mātuḥ svinna-gātrāyā visrasta-kabara-srajaḥ
dṛṣṭvā pariśramam kṛṣṇah kṛpayāsīt svabandhane*

"Krishn's mother worked so hard to bind him that her whole body was covered in sweat and the flowers and ornaments fell down from her hair. When the divine child realised how tired his mother was, he felt mercy in his heart and allowed her to bind him." (*Shrimad Bhagwatam*, 10.9.18)

In his commentary on this verse, Vishwanath Chakravarti Thakur says, "In the competition between Krishn and his devotee, the devotee's determination always wins. Even though Krishn was very stubborn, when he saw how tired his mother was, he gave up and let her tie him."

This is because Krishn's *kripa* is the queen of all his *shaktis*, and it melts his heart like butter. When Queen Kripa comes, Krishn's other *shaktis*, like the power to get whatever he wants (*satya sankalp shakti*), run away. The rope had been two fingers too short, and these two fingers represent the devotee's effort or *sadhan* and Krishn's *kripa*. Without *sadhan* and *kripa*, says Vishwanath, the rope will always remain two fingers too short.

(From "The Gaudiya Path Depends on Both Grace and Spiritual Practice" by Vaisnavacharya Chandan Goswami. Read more at www.shriradharaman.com)



The Story of a Butcher Named Sadan Kasai



The *Bhaktamal* tells the story of a man named Sadan who was born in a family of butchers. Because of blessings from a previous life, Sadan was a great devotee of the Lord. He was a kind man, without any impurity in his heart.

Due to circumstances beyond his control, Sadan found himself involved in the family business. However, he personally did not eat meat, nor did he kill any animals. Instead, he used to buy meat from other butchers to sell in his family shop. From dawn to dusk, he constantly chanted the Holy Name of Shri Krishn.

One day Sadan found a beautiful and attractive, smooth black stone on the way to work. So he carefully picked it up and took it to his shop. He started using the stone as a weight to measure meat. Sadan had no idea that the stone was a *shaligram shila*.

Sadan was so overwhelmed by the bliss of chanting the Holy Name that his tears would flow like a stream and unknowingly, he bathed *shaligram shila* with them. Also, *shaligramji* was the only weight he had. Sadan would use *shaligramji* to weigh a small amount of meat or a larger portion, yet the merciful *shaligramji* would shrink

and expand accordingly so that his devotee would not lose money.

Many days passed in this way. Then one morning a sadhu walked by Sadan's shop. His eye was suddenly attracted by the magnetically beautiful stone on Sadan's scale. Realising the stone was a *shaligram shila*, he scolded Sadan, "Do you have any idea who this is? This is Krishn himself in the form of a *shaligram shila*! How dare you offend him like this? Give him to me right now. I will take him away from this terrible place and care for him in the right way." Sadan felt terribly guilty and asked the sadhu for forgiveness. Feeling unworthy, Sadan gave *shaligramji* to the sage.

The sage took the *shaligram shila* home and bathed him carefully. He was saddened to think that the blood of animals had touched his sacred form. He began worshipping him twice a day, honouring him according to scriptural rules. The sage began developing feelings of pride, thinking that he was taking care of Krishn in the right manner. Krishn was very unhappy with this.



Sadan Kasai

Within a few days, Krishn came to the sadhu in a dream and said, "Take me to Sadan's house right away. You think that just by bathing me in *panchamrit*, you can purify me? Sadan bathes me with his tears, full of the nectar of his love for me. And when I have tasted the ambrosia of the Holy Names, which Sadan always offers me, how can your rich foods satisfy me in any way? I am not comfortable on this throne that you place me on. But Sadan gives me the greatest bliss by gently rocking me on the swing of his scale."

The next morning, the sadhu carefully picked up the *shaligram shila* and rushed straight to Sadan's house. Sadan invited

him inside, and he began to speak, "I have committed a great offence. I should never have taken this *shalagram shila* away from you. I bathed and worshipped him with all the established rituals, but he was not pleased by my offerings. He is intoxicated by your love for him. As you have captured his heart, please take him and continue pleasing him in the wonderful way that you do. Worship him or weigh meat with him. He is yours."

Hearing the words of the sadhu, Sadan understood the compassionate nature of Shri Krishn and he lost all awareness of his body. That very day, Sadan left everything behind and went to Jagannath Puri, taking *shaligram shila* with him.

Janmashtami and Radhashtami in Madhurya Bhav

The followers of Shri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu worship Radha and Krishn in the romantic mood (*madhurya bhav*). In this mood, Radha and Krishn are teenagers who are eternally in love (*yugal kishor*). Thus on their birthdays, Radhashtami and Janmashtami, Radha and Krishn are worshipped in this same romantic mood, and not as newborn babies.

On Janmashtami, Radharaman Lal's grand *abhishek* or ritual bath is held in the temple, similar to the one offered on his Appearance Day. Gunmanjari Das Goswami describes the mood of this moment:



Shri Janmashtami

श्री जन्माष्टमी

श्री राधारमण जन्म की आठें
परम महा मंगल दिन सजनी लागे आनंदठाठें
श्री शाण्डिल्य भागुरी कर अभिषेक वेद के पाठें
पीत बसन पहिराय तिलक कुमकुम करि दक्षिण बाटें
बाजे बजत विविध नाचत गुण बरनत बिरदन भाटें
गुणमंजरी तन मन धन वारत निरख बरस की गाँठें

*śrī rādhāramāṇ janm kī āṭhē
param mahā maṅgal din sajanī lāge
ānand-thāṭhē
śrī śāṇḍilya bhāgurī kar abhiṣhek ved ke
pāṭhē
pīt basan pahrāy tilak kumkum kari dakṣhiṇ
bāṭhē
bāje bajat vividh nāc̄hat guṇ baranat
biradan bhāṭhē
guñmañjari tan man dhan vārat nirakh
baras kī gāṭhē*

"On this most blessed of days, Priyaju is overflowing with bliss and looking so beautiful. Today is her beloved Radharaman Lal's divine Janmashtami celebration! Nand Baba and Vrishbhanu ji's priests, sages Shandilya and Bhaguri, recite Vedic hymns while Lala's ceremonial bath (*abhishek*) takes place. After the ritual, Shriji is dressed in yellow clothes. Using *kumkum* (sacred red powder), his Raj Tilak ceremony is performed and donations are distributed. On this special occasion, the sound of many instruments playing can be heard, and the devotees dance with joy as they sing Shriji's glories. Seeing this most blissful festival, Gunmanjari offers all she has, and all she is, to her beloved Radharaman."

The day after Janmashtami, Nandotsav is celebrated in the temple. Shriji wears a new yellow dress and gives a special *sandarshan* after Shringar Aarti. There is *prasad* distribution to all the Goswami families.

After morning *aarti*, there is a special tradition called *dahi keech*, in which the Goswamis sprinkle liquid yoghurt from the altar onto the devotees.

Other Goswamis playfully pour buckets of yoghurt mixed with water from the verandah above the temple courtyard, and toss coins and small toys into the crowd. Soon the temple fills with Brajwasi boys, who dodge the streams of yoghurt as they compete for the loot!

On Radhashtami, Radharani's *abhishek* takes place in the morning. She is bathed in front of the devotees, but hidden by a veil. Shriji wears yellow clothes, and in the evening, he sits on a special throne with Radharani. The special *bhog* is *tilpaak* (a sesame-seed sweet) and *panjiri* (a sweet made of toasted flour).

Radha and Krishn celebrate their birthday with their families, but they also celebrate with each other. Here Shri Gunmanjari Das Goswami describes how the Divine Couple celebrate Radharani's birthday privately, along with their *sakhis* and *manjaris* (maidservants), in a forest bower of Eternal Vrindavan.



Shri Radhashtami

श्री राधाष्टमी

श्री राधारमण जू तनमन फूले प्रिया जन्मदिन जानी ।
कियौ सिंगार आपने कर तें प्यारी को सुखदानी ॥

मृगमद कुमकुम तिलक भालपै रच्यौ परम रूचि जानी
नृत्यत नटनागर अति गति सों गावत मधुरी बानी
हार उतार देत निज उरतें अंग अतर में सानी
गुणमंजरी बीरी सखियन के बाँटत मृदु मुसिक्यानी

śrī rādhāramaṇ jū tanman phūle priyā
janmadin jānī
kiyau siṅgār āpane kar tē pyārī ko
sukhdānī
mṛgamaṇ kumkum tilak bhālpai racyau
param ruci jānī
nr̥tya naṭ-nāgar ati gati sō gāvat madhurī
bānī
hār utār det nij urtē aṅg atar mē sānī
guñmañjarī bīrī sakhiyan ko bāṭat mṛdu
musikyānī

"On the blissful day of Priyaju's birthday celebration, Radharaman is unable to contain his excitement! Today, he is dressing and decorating her with his own hands, giving her so much joy. A paste of musk and *kumkum* made exactly to her liking is applied on her brow. After *shringar*, Shriji dances with great passion, as he sings to her in his sweet voice.

"Seeing his impressive performance, Priyaju removes her necklace scented with her beautiful fragrance and offers it to him. And she gives her special grace to Gunmanjari in the form of her *prasadi paan*. With a smile, Gunmanjari celebrates the festival by distributing the *prasad* amongst the *sakhis*."

As Priya-Priyatam enjoy the bliss of this most special day, Gunmanjari Dasji asks for a special birthday blessing (*badhai*).

श्री राधारमण बधाई दीजै जो माँगू मैं आज ।
तुम्हारीं प्रिया की जन्मगांठ है नहीं करो अब लाज ॥
प्यारी चरन कमल की दासी करो रसिक सिरताज ।
गुणमंजरी के नाते मोकों राखो कुंजन माँझ ॥

śrī rādhāramaṇ badhāī dījai jo māgū maī
āj
tumhari priyā kī janmagāṭh hai nahī karo
ab lāj
pyārī čharan kamal kī dāsī karo rasik sirtāj
guñmañjarī ke nātē mokō rākho kuñjan
mājh

"O Radharaman, on this divine festival day of Radhashtami, do not hold back on your kindness. Please give me what I am asking for. I only have one desire; o Crown Jewel of the *rasiks*, please make me the maidservant of Priyaju's lotus feet. If you ask me who I am, then listen: I belong to Gunmanjari. Let this very bond be the reason that you bless me to live in the Nikunj of Eternal Vrindavan."

(All pads by Shri Gunmanjari Das Goswami with English translations from *Shri Radharaman Gita*)

Sanjhi Mahotsav

(September 25 - October 9, 2018)

Every autumn for two weeks, the Sanjhi Utsav is held throughout Braj. *Sanjhi* is a unique art form in which coloured powders, gems, flower petals or cow dung are used to draw detailed scenes of Radha and Krishn's *lilas*.

Sanjhi can be made on the ground, on walls, or even on the surface of water. But at the Shri Radharaman Temple, a special structure of raised earth is made, which becomes the canvas for *sanjhi*. Radharaman's *sanjhi* festival takes place at the Raas Mandal, and a different *sanjhi* is made each day for fifteen days.

The mood is that Radharani is busy with her family during *pitr paksh*, and thus she is not able to meet Krishn freely. In separation, she prays to Sanjhi Devi and lovingly draws *sanjhi* of her various *lilas* with her Beloved. The next morning, Radharani removes the previous night's *sanjhi* and creates a new one. On the last day of the festival, there is a celebration.

