

## EXCERPT FROM THE BOOK

### **- GAUDIYA VAISNAVA SAMADHIS IN VRINDAVANA -**

**by His Holiness Mahanidhi Swami**

#### Chapter Five **VISITING THE SAMADHIS**

##### The Grave Yard

When a person dies in a Christian country his complete body is sealed in a coffin and buried in a graveyard or cemetery. Every town has one; either small family plots or vast cemeteries with acres and acres of sprawling lawns. The individual graves are marked with tombstones standing in measured distances from one another. They look like giant marble dominoes signifying the futility of material life; how one soul is following the other in the endless cycle of birth and death (samsara cakra).

A material existence without spiritual practices means simply to live, to die, and to be buried in the family graveyard. "My great-grandfather followed this path, my grandfather followed him, and my father followed too—one after the other."

The Mahabharata says that once Yamaraja asked Maharaja Yudhisthira, "What is the most amazing thing in this world?" Maharaja Yudhisthira replied, "The most amazing thing is that at every moment one can see that his friends, his fathers, and his relatives have died, but he is thinking, 'I shall live forever.'"

I was about seven years old when I first visited the family cemetery plot to have "darsana" of Mac, my brother who had died of leukemia twelve years before. My parents cried as they recounted his glories. They said, "The good Lord must have had some purpose for taking away Mac at the tender age of four. Now we should all offer a silent prayer to God on his behalf."

The solemn and serious moment that followed stretched into eternity. The atmosphere was eerie. I prayed to God to not snatch me too. I felt anxious to get out of there as soon as possible, never return. Visiting the cemetery incited within me a fear of death, anxiety about life, and despair for the future.

The cemeteries or graveyards of the Christian countries are negative environments full of ghosts and ignorance, sorrow and attachment. Due to intense bodily attachment, a departed soul sometimes takes a ghostly (subtle) form to hover about its dead material body buried in the ground. A ghost exists in a perpetual state of anger and frustration because he has no physical material body to satisfy his desires. Scores of ghosts fly around graveyards frightening and harassing visitors, especially at night.

In the minds of many Christians, the word cemetery or graveyard conjures up images of ghosts, evil spirits, witches, black cats, and so on. Or as one person said, "A graveyard is a creepy place full of wierd, scary vibes." In other words, a cemetery is a place to avoid.

### **Mrytu Mahal**

Every year thousands of tourists go to Agra in India to see the Taj Mahal, one of the "seven wonders of the world." No doubt, the building qualifies as an architectural marvel, but it's generally seen as a dead palace for a dead body. What impression does one receive from visiting this tomb built by a king to honor his deceased queen?

The effect of seeing the Taj Mahal lasts no longer than the snap of a camera's shutter, or the passing of a few frames of video film. The experience moves not the heart, nor stirs the soul. After coming 10,000 miles just to see it, one tourist quipped, "Boy! I wonder, is this really one of the seven wonders of the world?"

Visiting the samadhis of the eternal associates of Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu is a totally different experience than seeing cemeteries or mausoleums. Unlike graveyards which are abodes of bad vibes, ignorance, and evil spirits, a samadhi pitha (place with many samadhis) overflows with pure goodness, uplifting spiritual energy, and the comforting association of benign Vaisnavas absorbed in transcendence. In other words, a samadhi pitha is an auspicious, most desirable and beautiful place to visit again and again.

## **Darsana Stories**

Vaisnava acaryas explain that the siddha purusas (perfectly liberated souls) have two spiritual forms. Within the samadhis they exist in a cin moya deha (spiritualized body). Simultaneously, in the transcendental realm of Goloka Vrndavana they have a second spiritual form to eternally serve the Divine Couple Sri-Sri Radha-Giridhari. The presence of a Vaisnava within his samadhi resembles the presence of the Supreme Personality of Godhead, Sri Krishna, in His arca vigraha, Deity form.

The arca vigraha of Sri Krishna reciprocates with the devotee according to the degree of his sraddha, seva, and puja (faith, service, worship). The six Gosvamis of Vrndavana, being completely pure, could personally talk with their beloved Deities of Damodara, Govindaji, Madan Mohana, Radha-ramana, and Giridhari. The Deity of Saksi-Gopala once stepped off the altar in Vrndavana and walked to Orissa (2,000 kms. away) in order to testify on behalf of His pure devotee. In the same way, from within their samadhi mandirs, the eternal associates of Lord Caitanya will reciprocate with a devotee's faith, service, and worship. Also, from receiving years and years of worship the place becomes saturated with devotional energy.

Although we bury the body of a departed Vaisnava, he still remains sitting there. Often, siddha saints, such as the six Gosvamis, give some indication to prove their presence within the samadhis. Shortly after his cremation, Raghunatha Dasa appeared to Sri Jiva Gosvami. He instructed Sri Jiva Gosvami to place his ashes in a samadhi at the Radha-Gopinatha temple beside Radha-kunda.

"Once Sri Radha Krishna Dasaji, a Vaisnava scholar and previous mahanta of Radha-kunda, told me (Gopalcandra Ghosh), Gopalaji, one day we were very much in anxiety about some property dealings concerning Radha-kunda. During this time I had a most unusual experience. At midnight, while I was chanting japa in my kutir at the side of Radha-kunda, I saw one sadhu in babaji dress coming out from inside of Raghunatha Dasa Gosvami's samadhi mandir.

'After bathing in Radha-kunda he looked directly at me, smiling ever so slightly. Then he entered the samadhi and vanished. Overwhelmed, I paid my dandavats. While lying before the entrance to Sri Raghunatha Dasa

Gosvami's samadhi, I heard someone say to me from inside the samadhi, "Don't worry, everything will turn out correctly. Just always chant Radharani's name and if you're doing this work for Her service then you will get victory. And if you think, 'this is my property, I am the mahanta ' and claim ownership, then you can't stay in Vrndavana."

Behind Radha Madana-Mohana temple, and off the parikrama marga is a place called Javatri Kunja. An old Surya temple graces that kunja. Bhaktamala says that Radhika and the gopis would come here and pluck java (red) flowers for worshiping Surya-deva and Yamuna-devi. Kishora Dasa baba, a scholar of Vrndavana, purchased this area and built a bhajana kutir here. Once at midnight while chanting japa, he saw a tall older man dressed in babaji cloth carrying a stick and a clay water pot. He was chanting very attentively and emitting a brilliant effulgence. After paying obeisances, Kishora Dasa asked, "Could you be Sanatana Gosvamipada?" The Babaji just smiled, said "Hari bol," and disappeared. To this day, Kishora Dasa feels that he definitely saw Sri Sanatana Gosvami.

Gauranga Dasa Babaji, a famous siddha mahatma of Vrndavana, repeatedly gave proof of his existence in his samadhi. Several times since his departure he has appeared to the devotees who stay in the ashram beside his samadhi. One night the members of the 24 hour kirtana party fell asleep. At exactly the same time, the samadhi pujari sleeping in the ashram had a dream. He saw Gauranga Dasa Baba choking and gasping for air. Startled, the pujari awoke, and rushed to the samadhi to wake the sleeping kirtana men and continue the Hari-Nama. The pujari realized that his guru had appeared to teach him that he was indeed living within his samadhi. He felt choked up when the kirtana party stopped chanting the holy name because the holy name was his food—his life—his breath.

A disciple and former personal servant of Srila Prabhupada said that Srila Rupa Gosvami once appeared to Srila Prabhupada while he was staying at the Radha-Damodara temple in Vrndavana. Before coming to America in 1965, Srila Prabhupada lived here as a renounced sannyasi chanting Hari Nama, praying to Radha-Damodara and the Gosvamis, and translating the Srimad Bhagavatam into English. One day while honoring maha-prasadam, Srila Prabhupada was looking out of the window at the samadhi of Sri Rupa Gosvami. Suddenly, Sri Rupa Gosvami appeared before Srila Prabhupada and spoke these most encouraging words:

"Maharaja, don't worry about anything. Go ahead and travel to the West and preach. Just preach the message of Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu and the chanting of Hare Krishna. You'll be successful. I guarantee because I will be right with you all the time."

### **How to Approach the Samadhis— Union in Separation**

In Vrndavana, the practice of visiting the samadhis of Lord Caitanya's eternal associates, offering worship, obeisances, and selected prayers has been going on continually for the last five hundred years. The Bhakti-ratnakara describes that before traveling to Navadvipa, Srinivasa Acarya took darsana of Vrndavana's Deities (Govindaji, Gopinatha, Madana Mohana, Radha Vinoda, Radha Damodara, and Sri Sankara Gopisvara Mahadeva). He also visited the samadhis of Sri Sanatana Gosvami, Sri Rupa Gosvami, Sri Kasisvara Pandit, and Sri Raghunatha Bhatta Gosvami, the only major ones at that time. Sri Jiva Gosvami, Sri Raghunatha Dasa Gosvami, Sri Gopala Bhatta Gosvami, Sri Lokanatha Gosvami, Sri Bhugarbha Gosvami, Madhupandit Gosvami, and Sri Krishna Dasa Kaviraja were all still manifest in Vrndavana. Before leaving Vrndavana, Srinivasa Acarya fell in the dust of their lotus feet and begged for mercy.

To summarize, a samadhi is a spiritual place where one can contact the association of a pure devotee of Radha and Krishna. In one form the pure Vaisnava remains within his samadhi in order to give mercy to faithful and sincere devotees. Samadhis play important part in Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu's pastime of distributing mercy to the fallen souls in Kali-yuga. Anyone, qualified or not, can easily come to the samadhis and take their benevolent association.

We must come to the platform of appreciating that here (at the samadhi) 'I can actually get the association of a pure devotee' No one is excluded. For example, during Srila Prabhupada's presence, some disciples hesitated to take his association due to feeling shy or too distant. Although wanting to, they never spoke directly to Srila Prabhupada or intimately associated with him. But now, Srila Prabhupada is freely and fully giving himself to everyone. Anyone can visit his samadhis in Vrndavana or Mayapur and receive his simply wonderful association.

One should approach Srila Prabhupada's or any samadhi with an attitude of surrender. Of course, feeling awe and reverence, one offers dandavats (full

prostrated obeisances). Literally, the word dandavat means full obeisances offered with eight limbs: two arms, two legs, two knees, chest, head, eyes, the mind, and the power of speech (prayers).

A disciple's awe and reverence shouldn't be in the "Vaikuntha mood," where awe and reverence are too strong. A disciple feels reverence in the sense of respect, but he maintains a friendly attitude and understanding toward his spiritual master. Narada Muni explains the loving relationship between guru and disciple in the Srimad Bhagavatam (7.12.1), *acaran dasavan nico, gurau sudrdha sauhrdah*: "A disciple should be humble and obedient, and he should have an attitude of firm friendship for the spiritual master."

We should think that the pure devotees still live here. They hear our prayers of submission, and they will shower their mercy upon us if we are sincere and deserving. With a humble mood and a pure devotional attitude we should observe all proper behavior. The eternal associates of Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu are actually there in their samadhis. Imagine if that Vaisnava was still manifest in this world? What would you do or how would you feel if you walked into his room, and found him sitting quietly in a meditative posture absorbed in deep concentration on the pastimes of Radha-Syamasundara? This is exactly the same experience of meeting a liberated Vaisnava in his samadhi mandir!

The reciprocation depends upon one's bhava (feelings) and his nistha (staunch faith). Spiritual feelings can carry our minds to that pure liberated devotee. However, without faith one will not receive anything at the samadhi. Similarly, without faith one can't receive any reciprocation when taking darsana of the Deity of Krishna.

While visiting a samadhi one feels a strong sense of communion with that departed Vaisnava. He receives direct inspiration and enthusiasm within his heart. But at the same time, one experiences profound lamentation and separation from that eternal resident of Vrndavana. There is union in separation. Indeed, all samadhis are places where faithful devotees feel happiness through directly associating with the blissful pure devotees. But simultaneously, one feels sadness in their separation.

By seriously cultivating that intense feeling of separation we will eventually meet Lord Gauranga's eternal associates and forever serve their lotus feet. Separation prepares the heart for meeting. A sincere devotee tries to feel the

separation for Lord Gauranga and His eternal associates that Sri Narottama Dasa Thakura describes in his song, *Ye anilo prema dhana*.

Gaudiya Vaisnava history shows that the traditional activity of visiting samadhis produces profound transcendental emotions within advanced devotees. Sri Bhakti-ratnakara describes two such visits by Sri Jahnava Mata, the wife of Sri Nityananda Prabhu, and Srinivasa Acarya.

After seeing Vrndavana and before returning to Navadvipa, Sri Jahnava Mata bid farewell to all the Vrajavasi Vaisnavas. Then she visited all the major temples— Govindaji, Gopinatha, Madana Mohana, Radha Vinoda, Radha-Damodara, and Radha Ramana. Also, she offered prayers to Gopisvara Mahadeva (Lord Siva) and Srimati Vrnda-devi. When Ma Jahnava Devi saw the four samadhis of Sri Raghunatha Bhatta Gosvami, Kasisvara Pandit, Sri Sanatana Gosvami, and Sri Rupa Gosvami her heart broke. Feeling deep sorrow, she cried a Ganges river of tears. Her ecstasy heightened when she saw the samadhi of Sri Gauridasa Pandit.

Upon arriving in Jagannatha Puri, Srinivasa Acarya quickly ran to the samadhi of Thakura Haridasa. Immediately he fell down to offer prayers and obeisances, and almost went unconscious. The assembled devotees pacified him with sweet loving words. Hearing about Srinivasa Acarya's lamentation at the samadhi of Srila Haridasa Thakura melts the heart.

### **Prayers at the Samadhis**

When visiting a samadhi one must offer vandanam (prayers - one of the nine limbs of bhakti). Love of Krishna expands in nine forms which connect a loving soul with his beloved Lord. Through vandanam yoga (connecting with God thru prayer) a devotee connects with the Supreme Lord Krishna or with the pure Vaisnava in samadhi.

Why pray? Praying shows our gratitude to Lord Krishna for mercifully giving us Vaisnava sadhu sanga. Sometimes one mistakenly thinks that prayers are meant only for God, and not for His pure devotee servants. However, the greatest demigod and the best of the Vaisnavas, Mahadeva Lord Siva, states that Vaisnava worship surpasses Vishnu worship. In the Adi Purana, Sri Krishna tells Arjuna that He doesn't accept those who only worship Him.

Ye me bhakta-janah partha/ ne me bhakta ca te janah mad bhaktanam caye bhaktas/ te me bhaktama matah

"Those who directly worship Me are not real devotees. Real devotees are those who are devoted to My devotees."

Srila Prabhupada used to say, "If you love me than love my dog." How genuine one's love for his master must be if he can love the master's dog? In this verse Krishna gives the clue to success in devotional service. Worship of the Vaisnavas is first and foremost, because they alone can lift us up to the lotus feet of Radha and Krishna.

Praying to the Vaisnavas pleases Krishna, purifies the heart, and attracts the attention of the Lord. After adopting the life of Krishna consciousness, one naturally becomes repentant for his past sinful activities. A repentant mentality is most conducive for spiritual advancement because "sinful desires burn up in the fire of repentance." Lord Krishna deposits His kṛpā sakti (mercy potency) within the pure heart of the Vaisnava. Being an ocean of mercy, the Vaisnava will surely rescue the repentant devotee desperately trying to escape the clutches of Maya.

Praying works. Krishna always responds to His devotee's call. This point is proven in the Gajendra moksa lila of the Srimad Bhagavatam. Srila Prabhupada always instructed us to pray to Krishna, and submit our confidential problems and desires. The all-merciful Lord will patiently hear our prayers and respond accordingly.

What should we pray for? "The only thing worth praying for is that our mind may be more and more attracted towards Lord Sri Krishna. We don't want riches or followers, nor do we desire to be saved from the misery of birth and death. We do not pray either for the cure of disease or for liberation. Rather, we approach the great souls and say, 'May you bless us that our minds may be directed to Krishna.' " (Srila Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati Thakura)

### **The Mood of Prayer**

Prayer reaches Krishna only when we surrender. Surrender means to be desperate. When we realize clearly our helpless position in this dangerous material world, we will pray sincerely and surrender absolutely to Sri Krishna.

There are many types of prayers from the selfish Christian variety, "God give us bread" to the distressed old lady who dropped her sticks. Answering her prayers, the Lord offered her a boon. The old lady asked, "Oh Lord, please just pick up the bundle of sticks and put them on my head." Prayers should be pure. The prayers of Sri Krishna Caitanya and the Gaudiya acaryas perfectly present the proper mood and aspiration for all Krishna bhaktas. In Siksastaka, Lord Caitanya teaches us to simply cry and pray that the Lord will accept us: *Ayi nanda tanuja kinkaram patitam mam vísame bhavambudhau.*

### **Authorized Prayers**

Sucaka kirtans (a biography in kirtana) are beautifully arranged prayers containing many verses glorifying the life and teachings of the acaryas. They are composed by a guru's leading disciples and usually sung during the tirobhava mahotsava (disappearance day festival) of the acarya. Other shorter prayers of glorification extend from five to twelve slokas such as Sri Raghunatha Dasa Gosvami's Sri Rupa Gosvami Astakam, Kavi Karnapur's Gopala Bhatta Gosvami Pancakam, and Sri Jiva Gosvami's Krishna Dasa Kaviraja Astakam. See appendix for Sri Rasikananda's Bhagavatastakam, and sucaka kirtans of the six Gosvamis.

Most devotees recite standard prayers composed by the previous acaryas. However, offering prayers is like chanting, in that there are no hard and fast rules for praying. Pour out your heart and beg for mercy. Here are a few samples of standard prayers. In Sankalpa-kalpa-druma, Srila Visvanatha Cakravarti Thakura prays to Sri Rupa Gosvami: "Oh hey Sri Rupa-manjari, Your mind is always colorfully decorated with the mellows of Radha Govinda's sporting pastimes. I anticipate with determination that I will someday receive a drop of your mercy. Your mercy stands supreme over everything else in attaining my desire."

In Sri Caitanya's Teachings, Srila Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati Thakura mentions Madhavendra Puri's prayer to Lord Krishna: "I have indulged numerous times in every form of wickedness by yielding to lust and other passions. But yet, these passions spare no pity on me. O Lord of the Yadus, Krishna, now I am giving them up. Realizing the truth, I surrender myself unto Your protection, which alone can save me from all fear. May You please engage me fully in Your service."

Srila Saccidananda Bhaktivinoda Thakura offers this prayer: "This is my only desire, O Lord, and I submit it at Your lotus feet. Please awaken in my heart constant unmotivated devotion to You. Let the same attachment that I now have for material affairs be transferred to attachment for Your holy feet. I pray that my love for You may remain undisturbed both in misfortune and prosperity. Day after day may my love for You increase by the power and influence of the holy name. May I live in heaven or hell, as a bird or beast, but may devotion to You always remain in the heart of Bhaktivinoda."

### **Composing Prayers**

The prayers quoted above can also be offered to the pure Vaisnavas whose interest is non-different from the Lord's. If a devotee wants to compose his own prayers, he should follow the guidelines given by Srila Prabhupada. The language of the prayer, or the conception being conveyed, should not be cheap. Use words full of feeling, especially chosen, and very nicely arranged. The teachings, activities, and contributions of the devotee being glorified will form the subject of your prayer. And finally, your bhakti will carry the prayer to the lotus feet of Lord Krishna and the pure devotee.

In Sri Caitanya Bhagavata, Srila Vrndavana Dasa Thakura quotes Lord Caitanya, "A devotee's prayers of love for Krishna have nothing to do with the rules of grammar, and they don't depend on them. Krishna is interested only in the love in such prayers. They are dear to Krishna in any case, whether they are gramatically correct or not."

Sri Krishna and His eternal associates accept prayers from devotees who follow the principles of devotional service. They will surely appreciate those sincere prayers offered with love and affection. To glorify the Vaisnavas one can chant authorized prayers, compose his own, or repeat those quoted here and in the Appendix.

(1) "My dear pure devotee of Krishna, please bless me and give me the shelter of your holy feet. Please keep my mind always pure and forever fixed at the lotus feet of Radha-Krishna. I shall live in Vrndavana, or outside, but may my mind always be attracted to Sri Vrndavana-dhama. In my mind may I always remember your names, qualities, teachings, and pastimes.

(2) "Oh Vaisnava Thakura! I am helpless without any shelter or protection. Please accept me at your lotus feet. Please bless me with the divine service of the servants of the servants of Radha Syamasundara."

(3) "Oh my Lord and master, my guardian and guide. Please reveal within me what is the Absolute Truth? Who am I? Where am I going? What is the goal of my life? How can I reach there? I don't know how to escape this miserable life. Please help me I want your service and nothing else. I am very much tired of my present situation. I can't tolerate it any longer. Please pick me up."

### **Qualification to Receive Benefits**

How does one become qualified to receive blessings from the saints in samadhi? If you are attached to a particular saint, if you surrender to him inwardly, and if you love him—he reciprocates. Diksa or no diksa (initiation) it doesn't matter. Stories abound of mahabhagavatas giving blessings without distinction. They only want the devotee to be genuine.

As previously stated, the mercy of the Vaisnava flows into a heart made receptive by nistha and bhava (firm faith and devotional fervor). Visiting a sadhu, temple, or a samadhi brings piety and elevates the soul. But without nistha and bhava one can't gain the guru's grace by coming to his samadhi.

Both Radha-Krishna temples and Vaisnava samadhis exist for all classes of devotees from the acolyte to the adept. The neophyte can't perceive Krishna's presence without the temple, whereas the advanced devotee sees Krishna everywhere. To make spiritual progress the lower order devotee absolutely must visit the temple. But when the elevated devotee comes to the temple he thoroughly relishes the sweet darsana of Sri-Sri Radha-Madhava.

Both classes of devotees benefit from visiting the temple, but the experience differs. Similarly, the neophyte devotee may not qualify to see or speak directly with the Vaisnava saint in a samadhi. Nevertheless, to advance spiritually he should dutifully and faithfully visit and serve the samadhis of Sri Caitanya Deva's eternal associates.

## **Serve the Dust**

Usually, neophyte devotees can't perceive much at a samadhi. But just by being there they can receive the greatest benefit. Sri Krishna Dasa Kaviraja shows an easy way to attain the highest treasure of Krishna prema in Caitanya-caritamrta Antya 16.60-61, bhakta-pada-dhuli ara bhakta-pada-jala, bhakta-bhukta-avasesa-tina maha bala/ ei tina-seva haite phukariya kaya, punah punah sarva-sastre phukariya kaya, "The dust of the feet of a devotee, the water that has washed the feet of a devotee, and the remnants of food left by a devotee are three very powerful substances. By rendering service to these three one attains the supreme goal of ecstatic love for Krishna. In all the revealed scriptures this is loudly declared again and again."

Prahlada Maharaja glorifies the Vaisnava pada dhuli (foot dust) in Srimad Bhagavatam (7.5.32), "Unless they rub on their bodies the dust of the lotus feet of a Vaisnava completely free from all sins, persons attached to material sense gratification can't be attached to the lotus feet of the Lord." When returning from Gaya, Lord Gauranga Mahaprabhu stopped in Kumarahatta, West Bengal, at the birth place of His spiritual master Sri Isvara Puri. Collecting some dust, Lord Caitanya declared, "This dust is My life and soul." Everyday Lord Gauranga would eat a pinch of this dust taken from the birth place of Sri Isvara Puri.

The Vaisnava's foot dust possesses tremendous spiritual power. Anyone can receive its benefits by collecting and eating it, serving it by rubbing the dust on his body, or rolling in it at the samadhis. The foot dust of the advanced Vrajavasi Vaisnavas, who are doing parikrama, mixes with the foot dust remnants of the mahabhagavatas in samadhi to produce a rich blend of transcendental mercy awaiting all takers at the samadhi mandirs.

## **Places of Inspiration**

As the appearance and disappearance days of the pure devotees are special times for prayers and celebrations, the samadhis are special places for increasing our inspiration and faith. For example, at Narottama Dasa Thakura's samadhi we sing Gurvastaka and pray for that realization about our guru to manifest within us. Remembering the accomplishments of the particular Vaisnava in samadhi inspires us to surrender more increases the

quality and quantity of our service, and solidifies our determination to attain the lotus feet of Radha-Gokulananda in this lifetime.

One can easily visit a temple and see the Deity of Sri Krishna. Similarly, samadhis give disciples and future followers an easy way to connect with a Vaisnava's spiritual energy. Smaranam (remembrance) of the Vaisnava expands greatly when visiting his samadhi. Lord Sri Krishna explains the benefits of remembering Him (or Krishna's pure devotee) in the Gopala-tapani Upanisad:

"By remembering Me, one who is impure becomes pure. By remembering Me, one who follows no vows becomes a strict follower of vows. By remembering Me, one who has studied no Vedic mantras becomes an expert knower of the Vedas."

Actually, many Vrndavana pandits admit that by worshiping and doing puja at the Gosvami's samadhis (such as Sri Sanatana Gosvami, Sri Rupa Gosvami, Sri Jiva Gosvami, Sri Gopala Bhatta Gosvami, and others) they definitely received special mercy to enter and deeply understand the Vedas and the Gosvami's granthas (books).

### **Samadhis Reform Japa**

In the material world there are auspicious and inauspicious times, places, and circumstances (kala, desha, patra). The predominance of a particular mode of nature determines the quality of any environment. For example, a brothel overflows with tamo-guna (ignorance), a city pulsates with passion (rajo-guna), and the country generates goodness (sattva-guna). But Krishna's temple is saturated with pure goodness (visuddha sattva), the pure, peaceful, and blissful atmosphere of Vaikuntha. Since goodness enhances spiritual practices, living in the country can help one fix his mind on God and advance spiritually. The Vedas list auspicious locations such as near sacred trees (Tulasi, Banyan, Peepul, Kadamba), beside holy rivers (Ganga, Yamuna), temples and samadhis. In Upadesamrta, Sri Rupa Gosvami says that there are gradations even within the absolute spiritual energy of the Supreme Lord Krishna. "Mathura is superior to Vaikuntha, Vrndavana excels Mathura, Govardhana Hill surpasses Vrndavana, and Sri Radha-kunda reigns supreme above all." Being cintamani, every grain of sand in Vrndavana has its distinct divine characteristics. Yet, Vamsi Vat means more than the general bank of the Yamuna. The acaryas proclaim that

devotional activities performed within the holy dhama (Vrndavana, Mayapur) produce one hundred times the result of those actions done elsewhere.

Since Sri Krishna cherishes His devotee so dearly, doing bhajana (nine forms of devotional service) near that devotee's samadhi brings one immense spiritual gain. Charged with spiritual vibrations, the samadhi of Krishna's pure devotee emits transcendental energy and encouragement. Therefore, doing bhajana here makes one spiritually strong, just as chanting Hare Krishna before Tulasi-devi gives one immeasurable spiritual benefit. During Kartika month in Vrndavana, many elevated saints sit near Sri Rupa Gosvami's samadhi at the Radha-Damodara temple. They pray, chant japa, kirtana, bhajans, and recite stutis and stotras (verses and prayers).

One Vrajavasi Gaudiya Vaisnava explained the relationship between visiting samadhis and chanting the holy name. "Whenever I visit the samadhi of Thakura Haridasa in Puri, I just automatically begin chanting Hare Krishna. The holy name just pours out. Srila Haridasa Thakura is such a significant and magnanimous personality that even stone-hearted people can immediately receive his mercy. Of course, it's the same everywhere. Wherever you go and visit a samadhi, you definitely get the direct association of a great Vaisnava, a great devotee. The intimate association with a pure devotee Vaisnava increases the quality of your japa, your reading, and your praying."

## **Chapter Six** **WORSHIP AND FESTIVALS**

### **Avirbhava Equals Tirobhava**

Philosophically, the avirbhava (appearance day) and tirobhava (disappearance day) of a pure Vaisnava are the same. The acarya's appearance and disappearance is not like the ordinary person's birth and death. The existence of a Vaisnava compares with the visibility of the sun. The sun shining in the clear blue sky represents the devotee's living amongst us in his prakṛta rupa (visible form). His disappearance from this world resembles the sun being hidden behind the clouds. He disappears in one place and appears in another. Therefore, a tirobhava simultaneously creates

an avirbhava. When a pure Vaisnava leaves his prakṛta rūpa, he receives an aprakṛta rūpa (spiritual body or deha) to eternally serve Radha-Syamasundara in Goloka Vrndavana. Here it appears as a tirobhava but in the spiritual world it is an avirbhava. The pure devotee disappears from our vision, only to appear before the vision of Radha-Syamasundara in the Sri Vrndavana-dhama.

Whether living in the material or the spiritual world, the pure devotee always engages in the selfless loving service of Radha and Krishna. Srila Bhaktivinoda Thakura states that a Vaisnava exists eternally packed up with the Lord in transcendental sound vibration.

*He reasons ill who tells that Vaisnavas die  
When thou art living still in sound!  
The Vaisnavas die to live, and living try  
To spread the Holy Name around.*

In the material world the Vaisnava passes his days chanting Nitai-Gauranga and Hare Krishna, dancing, and honoring Prasadam. He does the same in the spiritual world. Once upon a time a sage gave different kinds of blessings to different types of people. He blessed a prince, raja-putra ciram jiva, "You are the king's son, you should live forever." Then the sage blessed a Vaisnava, sadhavo jiva va mara va, "You can live or die, as you choose." Since royal families are prone to illicit sense enjoyment, the sage blessed the prince to live forever. Because after death the prince would go to hell to pay for his sins. However, the Vaisnava could live or die because either way he continues the same activity— blissfully serving the lotus feet of the Supreme Personality of Godhead, Sri Krishna.

### **The Tirobhava Ceremony**

After his disappearance the Vaisnava's body is put in the padma asana (sitting cross-legged). His right hand is folded in the Vaisnava mudra (held to the heart as if chanting on japa beads). A second position is both palms touching and held to the chest in the classical namaste pose. Mayavadis shape their hand in the dhyana mudra, or they rest both palms up on the knees.

Devotees bathe the body with Yamuna water (abhiseka). Priests write different mantras on the Vaisnava's body with gopi candana. The choice of

mantras depends upon the particular bhava of that devotee. Sri Gopala Bhatta Gosvami says to write the following mantra on the chest and arms of Gaudiya Vaisnava sannyasis in his Samskara-dipika (verse 45): Om klim srim hrim srim lavana mridyujī bhumi svabhre svaha, "Covering this body with clay and salt, we now offer it to the earth."

After applying tilak and sandal paste to the Vaisnava's forehead, he's dressed in new cloth, and tulasi leaves are put in his hand. Then arotika is performed, and a number of articles are offered such as copies of the Srimad Bhagavatam and Bhagavad-gita, tulasi neckbeads, japa mala, karatalas, Deity prasadam, kamandalu (water pot), begging bowl, and walking stick (if he used one). These articles are consecrated into the earth along with the spiritual body.

In the same sitting posture the body is lowered into the earth. The hole should be one foot deeper than the height of the person.

After sprinkling turmeric over the body, the entire body is covered with huge quantities of salt. The samadhi site will be marked with a slightly raised mound of earth. A simple or grand samadhi mandir may be built later to honor and provide worship for that departed Vaisnava.

On January 1, 1937 Srila Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati Thakura, the spiritual master of His Divine Grace A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada, entered the eternal pastimes of Sri-Sri Gandharvika-Giridhari. His biography describes the tirobhava ceremony:

"After Om Vishnupada (108) Sri Srimad Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati Gosvami Maharaja Prabhupada's disappearance pastime, his transcendental body was worshiped with scented oil, flowers, and sandal paste. Then his spiritual body was brought before the Deities in the Sri Sarasvati Auditory Hall (in Calcutta) and decorated with flowers, garlands, and cloth. There the appropriate worship and arotika was performed.

"Then Srila Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati Thakura's body was brought by train to the Yogapitha in Sridhama Mayapur, where a tremendous kirtana was held for the whole night. The work of the samadhi was immediately begun by the sannyasis, babajis, brahmacaris, grhastas, and vanaprasthas who had all taken shelter at his lotus feet. At the end of the night the samadhi mantras

were written on his body according to the directions of the Samskara Dipika by Sri Gopala Bhatta Gosvami.

"His spiritual body was then brought to the samadhi site and placed on a throne of white marble. His feet were anointed with aguru and sandalwood paste. The flowers offered to his feet were collected (to make pushpa samadhi). Flower garlands were offered around his neck. His favorite bhajans were sung: Sri Rupa-manjari, Svananda-sukhada-kunja manohara, and Yasomati-nandana. Then, chanting ye anilo prema dhana, the devotees circumambulated the samadhi site four times. The samadhi was covered with earth, marked with the sign of Gaudiya Vaisnava tilak, covered with flower garlands, and tulasi plants were sown on all sides. A fire sacrifice, bhoga offering, and an arotika were performed. There were readings from the Disappearance of Srila Haridasa Thakura, and Srila Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati Thakura's poems from the end of his Anubhasya.

"Thus, the acarya sun, as he had been called by his father Srila Bhaktivinoda Thakura, passed from earthly vision and entered the eternal pastimes of the Lord."

### **Daily Worship at the Samadhis**

The Gaudiya Vaisnava sampradaya accepts that the guru fully represents the Supreme Lord Krishna (saksad dharitvena samasta sastrair). Therefore, they worship guru and Govinda together with the same enthusiasm. Besides being an incarnation of Sri Krishna's spiritual power and therefore fully capable of representing the Supreme Lord, the guru exists eternally as a dear companion of both Radha-Govinda and Sri Krishna Caitanya Mahaprabhu (kintu prabhor yah priya eva tasya).

Although the Supreme Lord Krishna and His pure devotee exist on the same level, according to vidhi marga (path of rules), the guru's samadhi should be separate from but near Krishna's temple. Vrndavana's main temples passed a law that a pujari can't do the samadhi puja, and then reenter the main temple of Radha-Krishna. A separate pujari must perform the worship in the samadhi. The Radha Ramana temple Goswamis must bathe after they offer puja inside Sri Gopala Bhatta Gosvami's samadhi on his tirobhava.

Establishing any type of samadhi (full body, pushpa, smrti) for a departed Vaisnava means that that person actually resides there. Because he's there,

the temple will appoint separate pujaris to perform the worship. Generally, Gaudiya Vaisnava babajis, sannyanis, or brahmacaris do the worship.

Puja means a living attitude. With that mood the pujaris render warm and personal service to the Vaisnavas in their samadhis. Services include cooking and offering bhoga (food) and water, arotika, and providing his japa mala and Srimad Bhagavatam, complete with bookstand for easy reading. Pujaris make seasonal adjustments in the worship. During winter, they bathe the samadhi with warm Yamuna water and cover with a heavy wool blanket. In the summer, they offer a cool bath, drinking water, and an electric fan. Through their humble service attitude the samadhi caretakers preserve the transcendental message and transmit the mood of that liberated Vaisnava. A true bhakta serves the samadhi with the same depth of devotion with which he serves the Deity of Krishna.

There are two methods of Vaisnava worship in the samadhis. Either he receives Deity maha-prasada, or items prepared by his own pujaris. In the first system, all items are first offered to the presiding Radha-Krishna Deities in the main temple.

Then the Lord's foodstuffs, cloth, water, candana, and other remnants go to the Vaisnava as Krishna's maha-prasadam. Previously, the Madana Mohana pujaris used to bring maha-prasadam pera (milk sweet) and a pot of water down the street to Sri Sanatana Gosvami's samadhi. But today, "due to inconvenience," the temple Gosvamis have asked the babajis living at the samadhi site to prepare the food, offer it to their personal Deities, and then give that maha-prasadam to Sri Sanatana Gosvami.

### **Sri Gopala Bhatta Gosvami's Samadhi Puja**

In Vrndavana, the Radha Ramana temple management committee maintains the highest standard of worship at the samadhi of Sri Gopala Bhatta Gosvami. Living next to his samadhi, a crew of Gaudiya Vaisnava babajis attentively and lovingly serve him throughout the day. Daily they chant first-class bhajans and kirtans, and recite the Srimad Bhagavatam for his pleasure. Twice a day, (noon raja bhoga & evening) they offer him full plates of Radha Ramana's maha-prasadam. They also offer him fresh cool drinking water in a clay kamandalu (water pot with a spout). In a separate kitchen, the caretakers prepare five more bhoga offerings for Sri Gopala Bhatta Gosvami. Five arotikas follow the food offerings. Directly after the evening

arotika, Radha Ramanaji's pujari gives the Lord's maha flower garland to the samadhi pujari for Gopala Bhatta.

Sri Gopala Bhatta Gosvami also receives worship inside of Radha Ramanaji's temple. At raja bhoga, the pujaris offer three plates: one for Radha Ramana and the Salagrama silas, one for Srimati Radharani, and one for Gopala Bhatta. Sri Padmanabha Goswami, a pujari of Radha Ramana, explains why: "We feel that Gopala Bhatta Gosvami is personally there inside of Radha Ramanaji's temple. He's present in the remnants of the wooden asana that Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu had personally sent here from Jagannatha Puri as a gift for Gopala Bhatta Gosvami."

In Vrndavana, at the magnificent samadhi of His Divine Grace A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada, ISKCON (The International Society for Krishna Consciousness) devotees offer first class worship full of devotion. The puja standard closely resembles Sri Gopala Bhatta Gosvami's. Srila Prabhupada instructed disciples to learn proper puja procedures from the Radha Ramana temple.

Besides the daily puja and the yearly tirobhava mahotsava (disappearance day festival), there are other festivals held at the samadhis. Upon taking initiation into the Gaudiya Vaisnava family line of rupanugas (followers of Sri Rupa Gosvami), a new disciple may sponsor a special utsava (festival). For example, at Rupa Gosvami's samadhi, he could arrange for Hari Nama sankirtana and Bhagavata katha, offer an opulent feast to Sri Rupa Gosvami, and then distribute it to all the Vrajavasi Vaisnavas.

### **Tirobhava Mahotsava (yearly disappearance celebration)**

Like the sun, the Vaisnavas are always present. But on account of our faulty perception they seem to "disappear." Hari Sauri Dasa reports that Srila Prabhupada told disciples to fast until noon on both the appearance and disappearance days of our predecessor acaryas. If possible, do the same for the six Gosvamis, Krishna Dasa Kaviraja, Narottama Dasa Thakura, Visvanatha Cakravarti Thakura, and others. Spiritually, a Vaisnava's appearance and disappearance day are equal.

Although Srila Prabhupada wanted both days to be observed, Gaudiya Vaisnavas traditionally only celebrate the tirobhava (disappearance day). The festival honors that pure Vaisnava who attained a manjari svarupa

(spiritual form of a maidservant), and entered the eternal service of Radha-Gopinatha within the pleasure groves of Sri Vrndavana-dhama. "Celebrate the avirbhava (appearance day) of Vishnu (Krishna) and the tirobhava (disappearance day) of the Vaisnava," say the Gaudiyas. Of course, the more one worships the devotees, the more one makes advancement. But elaborate ceremonies are usually held on the disappearance day.

Why "worship the avirbhava of Vishnu and the tirobhava of the Vaisnava?" Immediately upon appearing on earth, the Vishnu avatars such as the Dasa Avatars (Matsya, Vamana, Nrsimha, Rama) act to bless, instruct, and protect everyone. They bring peace and prosperity to the world. Therefore, the appearance day of Lord Vishnu and His many forms is honored.

When a Vaisnava first appears in this world he doesn't show any greatness or make any contribution. After some years he begins to manifest his spiritual power. The karma (activities) of the Vaisnava far outweigh his janma (birth). A Vaisnava's life of pure devotion and spreading Krishna consciousness is honored with a mahotsava. This is a grand festival of flowers, kirtana, puja, poetry, prasadam, and a procession.

Sri Padmanabha Goswami explains the reason for celebrating a Vaisnava's tirobhava:

"When a devotee takes birth he has not really done anything yet. After his death everyone knows what great work he did. So we celebrate this time. At that time the Vaisnava enters Radha-Krishna's nitya-lila and that's a great cause for celebration. According to Gaudiya Vaisnava philosophy, we believe that the departed Vaisnava joins the lila of Radha and Krishna and the asta-sakhis (eight intimate gopis) as a servant of the servant of the servant—the mood of gopi bhava. Just inside our altar of Radha Ramanaji, we worship Gopala Bhatta Goswami in his eternal form as Guna-manjari, serving the lotus feet of Srimati Radharani."

Standard Gaudiya Vaisnava texts don't give any prayers for singing on the appearance day of a pure devotee. But they mention hundreds of stavas, stutis, and sucaks (varieties of mantras and bhajans) to sing on the disappearance day. Most Gaudiya Vaisnava panjikas (yearly calendars) list only the disappearance days of the Vaisnava acaryas.

## How to Observe a Tirobhava

On the tirobhava (disappearance day) of a pure Vaisnava a devotee should visit his samadhi. Then he should offer obeisances circumambulation, arotika, songs, prayers, and Deity maha-prasadam or bhoga sweets. In Vaisnavism, Srila Thakura Bhaktivinoda gives the following translation to Sri Vaisnava Pranama, vanca kalpa tarubhyas ca krpa sindhu...

"Let us kiss over and over again the holy feet of the devotees of Krishna who are like purpose trees, yielding the fruit of all our devotional desires. They are oceans of kindness and purifiers of the fallen."

Since Vaisnavas are always pleased with maha-prasadam, you may first offer the flower garland, fruit, and milk sweets to the temple Deity. Then take Radha-Damodara's maha-prasadam and offer it to Sri Rupa Gosvami in his samadhi. On the tirobhava of Sri Jiva Gosvami, follow the same procedure, but take Sri Rupa Gosvami's remnants and give them as maha-maha-prasadam to Sri Jiva Gosvami in his samadhi.

Sucaka Kirtans (a biography in song) are special kirtans full of verses glorifying the life and teachings of the departed Vaisnava saint. Sung on the tirobhava, these beautiful prayers sometimes go on for two or three hours. (See Appendix for sucaka and other kirtans)

A tirobhava mahotsava consists of extra pujas in the samadhi, abhiseka, kirtans, new dresses, reading of praises, singing sucaks, and a bhoga offering. The standard tirobhava offering is malpua, "a cake with rasa." Malpua somewhat resembles a pancake fried in ghee and soaked in sugar water. Served with yogurt and subji, malpua is a Vraja area tradition. In olden days, malpua was the standard samadhi offering for a tirobhava mahotsava. But today, thrifty temples have substituted the cheap dry laddhu for the more costly, mouth-watering malpua.

All the six Gosvamis, except Sri Raghunatha Dasa Gosvami, receive substantial bhoga offerings during their tirobhava mahotsavas. At Radha-kunda, devotees respect Raghunatha Dasa Gosvami's mood of strict renunciation by daily offering him (inside his samadhi) only buttermilk, maha Tulasi leaves and water from Radha-Gopinatha. But on his divine disappearance day they prepare a full feast and place it just outside his samadhi.

The tirobhava mahotsava is a three day festival. It begins the day before the Vaisnava's disappearance day with a non-stop twenty-four hour Hare Krishna maha-mantra kirtan. The first day is called the Adhi vasa, when devotees sing different padas and bhajans (songs) inviting Radha and Krishna, Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu, the Panca-Tattva, Lord Gauranga's eternal associates, and all the Guru-Tattva to attend the disappearance ceremony of Sri Gopala Bhatta Gosvami. (cited as an example)

On day two, the actual disappearance day (tirobhava tithi), devotees worship Sri Gopala Bhatta Gosvami in his samadhi and observe a full fast. The Goswami mahants of Vrndavana's seven major temples will offer individual worship at the samadhi. In the morning, the Brahmana men, of every Goswami family serving Radha Ramanaji, will offer puja, arotika, garlands, and pranams at Gopala Bhatta Gosvami's samadhi.

In the evening, the brahmana's wives must take darsana of Gopala Bhatta Gosvami. They offer whole coconuts in the samadhi and pray, "Please protect and maintain our family, and increase our number of male members." Why males? Because only men can serve the Deity of Radha Ramanaji. This particular practice of the ladies is traditional only at Radha Ramana temple. Sri Hari-Nama nagar sankirtana, joyous dancing, and maha-prasadam fill the third and final day of the festival.

Any devotee, even if he has no money or materials, can sincerely worship the pure devotee on his tirobhava. The following pastime shows a pure and simple way to do it.

Once on Sri Sanatana Gosvami's tirobhava, Sri Gaura Kishora Dasa Babaji Maharaja said, "This afternoon we shall have a great festival, a tirobhava mahotsava, to honor the holy day of the passing of Srila Sanatana Gosvami." His servant Bihari replied, "But Babaji Maharaja, you are totally renounced and have nothing. Where will you get the things needed for a festival?" "We don't need anything," explained Babaji Maharaja, "We may fast and chant the holy name of Krishna. And in this humble way, we shall enjoy a great festival."