

MAHA RAAS

(The Raas Leela from the tenth canto of the Shrimad Bhagwat Mahapurana)

Discourses held at the Birla Mandir, New Delhi, January 2008.

By

Swami Girishanand Saraswatiji

THE RAAS LEELA
from the 10th canto of the
Shrimad Bhagwat Mahapurana

Transcribed by:
Smt. Sarita Himmatsinka

Translated by:
Smt. Purnima L. Toolsidass

Sponsored by:
Smt. Manju and Shri Arvind Newar

Cover Page Designed by:
www.sometimesy.biz

Printed by:
PRINTWAY

SAKET DHAM ASHRAM

Gwari Ghat
Jabalpur - 482 008
Ph : 0761 2667595
M : 09981806980

ANAND VRINDAVAN ASHRAM

Moti Jheel
Vrindavan - 281 124
Ph : 0565 2540487
M : 09412278561

MAHA RAAS

Discourses held at the Birla Mandir, New Delhi
January 2008

By

Swami Girishanand Saraswatiji

Maha Raas

Welcome

Bharat (India) is the land where Saints have always practiced asceticism. Bharat is fringed by the Himalayas. This is the land where Shri Rama and Shri Krishna did their *leelaa* (frolics). It is this land that resounds with the Vedas, Upanishads, Ramayana, Mahabharata, etc.

It is from this land that enlightened Masters like Buddha, Mahavira, Nanak and Swami Akhandanandji gave the world the nectar of *adhyaatma* (metaphysical truths). At this point in time, another great soul has manifested, and he was given the name Swami Shri Girishanandji by his Guru Swami Shri Akhandanand Saraswati.

Swami Girishanandji has understood the anguish of our era. The good of society fills his great heart. This is why every individual in our society clings to his thoughts, and is supported by his words, as he progresses in life. Swami Girishanandji is the personification of simplicity, humility, and tolerance. His talks have both force and music.

So, come; let us listen to, and enjoy his nectarine discourse.

(Shri Jajoo)

Mangalacharan.

*Shaantam shaashvatamaprame`yam anagham
nirvaanashaantipradam,
brahmaashambhufadeendrase`vyamanisham ve`daantave`dyam
vibhum,
raamaakhyam jagadeeshvaram suragurum maayaamanushyam
harim
vande`ham karunaakaram raghuvaram
bhoopaalachoodaamanim.*

*Varhaapeedam natavaravapuh karnayokarnikaaram,
Bibhradavaasah kanakakapisham vaijayanteem cha maalaam.
Randhraan ve`noradharasudhaya poorayan gopavrindaih,
Vrindaaranyam svapadaramanam praavishad geetakeertih.*

*Sacchidaanandaropaaya vishvotpadyaadihe`tave`,
Taapatrayavinaashaaya shreekrishnaaya vayam numah.*

*Yam pravrajantamanupe`tamape`takrityam
Dvaipaayano viharakaatarayaajuhaava,
Putre`ti tanmayataa taravobhine`dustam
Sarvabhootahridayam muninaanatosmi.*

*

*

*

MAHA RAAS

My prostrations at the feet of Shri Sadgurudev.

Respected Shri and Smt. Birlaji, Respected Binaniji, Jajooji, and all Bhagwan's bhaktas gathered here.

I first extend my good wishes for the New Year. May *prabhu pre`ma* (love for the Ishwara) come into your lives. May you have the bhakti that is a human being's greatest achievement. May we gather again in this purifying courtyard of the Birla Mandir, where my revered Gurudev, Swami Akhandanandji Maharaj used to give spiritual discourses; as did Pujya Pundit Ramkinkarji Maharaj, from whom I later received much guidance. I bow down to them repeatedly.

Shri and Smt. Birla had great *nishthaa* (faith) in Shri Maharajji, and were deeply loved by him. Shri Maharajji had told them that he has given his body to them to care for as they thought fit. How great was his love for, and confidence in them, to leave himself so completely in their hands! And, Maharajji's task – to give people the opportunity to listen to Bhagwan's leelas – was fulfilled by them as well. It is only a selected few to whom the Mahapurush (Saints) say such words.

Bhagwan Shri Rama told Bharatji at Chitrakoot, 'I had to go the forest to uphold the word of our father. It is extremely difficult for Me to not obey his command. Even so, Bharat, I am prepared to give up everything and do what you say.' In my opinion, Bharatji was the only person to whom Shri Rama could say this. He could not have said it to Laxmanji! Had He made this offer to Laxmanji, he would at once have asked Shri Rama to return to Ayodhya! Shri Rama had absolute confidence that Bharatji would only follow Shri Rama's *sankalpa* (resolve). He knew, 'Bharat will only do what I want.'

This is the kind of faith my Gurudev had for Shri and Smt. Birla, who we all respect. The life they lead is an ideal life. We have much to learn from the way they live. I am aware that it embarrasses them when I say these things, but my regard for them compels me to do so.

An ideal Grihastha (married householder) is as difficult to find in these times as an ideal Sanyasi (Monk). As Jajooji said, the arrangements Shri and Smt. Birla have made, and the subject they have chosen, are both par excellence. Speaking in the language of literature, I would say that only a *virala* (rare) person can choose such a topic. So, their surname is Birla, and they are virala – meaning, they are one in a million!

This topic – the Maha Raas – is basically a 'raas' – a group dance. The word 'raas' comes from 'rasa' – deep, enriching emotion. Whose rasa is it? From rasa comes raas. *Rasa naama samoohaa raasa*. Rasa is at the root of the Maha Raas. And if we believe the Shrutis (verses of the Vedas) – *Rasovaisaah. Rasama hye`vaaya labdhaa aanandee bhavati*. Only the Paramatma is the essence of rasa. The jeeva (an individual; an Atma attached to a body) cannot experience *aananda* (pure bliss) until he has a direct experience of the Paramatma.

The word 'he`va' is used here. *Rasama he`vaayaam labdhaa aanandee bhavati*. The word heva indicates that no other object has the power to bestow pure bliss. A statement is accepted as authentic only when it is written in the Shastras, told by a Saint, or experienced personally.

Shruti, *yukti*, and *anubooti*. *Shruti* means the Shastras, *yukti* means what we understand from the spiritual discourses of Saints, and *anubooti* means our own experience. Our *Shrutis* say that only the Paramatma is *rasa svaroop*a – the essence of pure sweetness. You can call that Paramatma Shri Rama, Bhagwan Shiva, Bhagwan Shri Krishna, or Ma Durga – it can be any name, but the Paramatma is one, and He alone is the essence of pure bliss.

This is the experience of the Saints. I may have told you about this incident before. A *saadhaka* (seeker of the supreme) came to my Guruji at Rishikesh. He was a genuine seeker, and he wanted to get a direct experience of Satya (that, which can never be negated; the Paramatma). It was in the evening, perhaps this time. Maharajji used to give discourses in the morning and reply to questions in the evening. They were all sitting on the sandy bank of the Gangaji. This sadhak came and said, 'Please give me the *saakshaatkara* (direct experience) of real *shaanti* (peace). I am prepared to do anything to get this experience. If you tell me to jump from a mountaintop, or into the Gangaji, I am ready to do so, but I want to know real peace. I want to know what real rasa is. I have not yet experienced this.'

A Sadguru is one who can fathom the level of a sadhak. Shri Maharajji saw that the man was a true sadhak. He had become free of worldly desires. 'Will you do as I say?' asked Maharajji.

'Yes,' he replied. 'I told you that I am prepared to even jump into the Ganagji. Just tell me what I should do, to obtain *sacchi shaanti* (true peace).'

'There is no need for you to jump into the Gangaji, or from the top of the mountain,' said Maharajji. 'You desire an experience of real peace. Give up this desire.'

The man was startled. 'Maharaj, this is my only goal in life, and you are telling me to give it up?'

'You gave me your word that you would do what I tell you,' said Maharajji. A Guru knows where the stumbling block is. Maharajji knew that the man had given up all his desires; the only desire left was the wish to experience peace. So he said, 'Let go of even this desire.' I have read about this incident in Maharajji's memoirs, and also heard him speak about it. The man asked once, 'Should I really give up even the desire to experience perfect peace?'

'Yes.'

As soon as the man gave up his last desire, he went into a Samadhi. He sat for more than half an hour. The color of his complexion changed. He seemed to radiate joy. He had gone into a *nirvikalpa samaadhee* – a state of deep meditation where the mind is settled – because there were no desires left in him. He had the experience of perfect peace – or *rasa*, or the Paramatma – call it what you will. When he got up after almost one hour, his eyes were dazed, and he was smiling. Maharajji was also smiling. He bowed at Maharajji's feet. 'I experienced peace,' he said, and went away. What I mean to say is that this was the *yukti* (method) of a Saint. The Saints also tell us that peace – or *rasa* – is the essence of the Paramatma and no one else.

Come, let us discuss the third point – anubhuti. The Shruti said, '*Rasovaisaah*'. The Saints told us that only the Paramatma is the essence of sweetness. And anubhuti? Anubhuti is the experience we have, any one of us. We can, any one of us, experience *sukha-shaanti* (happiness-peace), but it must be a real sukha-shanti. Please underline real! People experience a temporary happiness when they celebrate the birth of a son, and then the same son becomes a cause of tension. If he passes his exams you rejoice, and then start preparing for the next class. I am not telling you about such temporary sukha-shanti. This is not the real sukha-shanti. I know that many learned people are here, listening to these talks. Undoubtedly some of them would have obtained the authentic experience of real sukha-shanti.

This experience cannot be obtained by any external object. It is obtained when we let go of all the external factors and go within. You can call it the anubhuti (an emotional experience) of Prabhu, or His *saakshaatkaara* (direct experience through the senses). Use whichever word you like, but if you have had the experience, it is given by the Paramatma. You did not get it from money, fame, or family. In worldly sukha, one side is sukha and the other is dukha (sorrow). That is the difference. Worldly sukha is always attached to sorrow, with regard to the same person and the same circumstances.

The prosperity of your friend will make you feel happy, but if – ten years hence he is no longer your friend – what will you feel? Nothing! If he becomes your enemy, his prosperity will hurt you.

The son who gives you so much happiness today may become a cause of your sorrow one day, whether he is a good son or a bad son. You may ask how a good son can give you sorrow; but when he is unhappy about something, won't you feel sad? Tell me! Of course you will!

Therefore, your son, wife or friend will not be a direct cause of suffering for you if they are good, but you will suffer when you see them suffer. This is the difference between worldly sukha and real sukha. Worldly sukha is always attached to dukha, but the essence of the sukha of Bhagwan – which is rasa – has no dukha attached to it. *Rasovaisaah*. That contains only sweetness. There is no counter-agent in it.

In the episode of Mother Devhuti in the Bhagwat, Kapil Bhagwan said, 'Mother, *yogah aadhyaatmika proktaah* – the only *saadhana* (method for obtaining the Supreme) for *param shaanti* (supreme peace) is *aadhyaatmika yoga* (attaching ourselves to the Brahman).'

'What will that achieve?'

'It will achieve a complete removal.'

'A complete removal of what?'

'The feeling that sorrow and happiness are real. You will no longer experience worldly dukha. Nor will you experience worldly sukha.'

'Then which sukha will I experience?'

'The sukha that is the essence of pure happiness. The sukha that can never be separated from your Self. The Paramatma who can never leave you.'

You just heard Jajooji say that the Paramatma does not have the capacity to leave you. He just can't do it! So the sukha that you no longer feel cannot be your essence.

If an object is dependent on any other factor, it is nothing more than a visitor who will leave sooner or later.

Let us come to the subject of our discourse. *Rasovaisaah*. That Bhagwan, who is the embodiment of rasa, is Kanhaiya – Shri Krishna. He is a thief who steals butter from the gopis. He is the darling son of Yashoda. Just saying these things gives joy. Why? Because the Paramatma of Vedanta is a *shaanta rasa* (the sweet emotion of tranquility). Our Maharajji divided them this way. The Brahman of Vedanta is the shanta rasa, and the Shri Krishna of bhakti is a bliss that dances. They are the same, but this is the difference in them.

You may say that He is the Brahman, and He is the Paramatma. It gives pleasure to hear this. You rattle off the description, ‘He is the son of Yashoda. He steals butter from the gopis. He is the one who breaks the pots.’ It is none other than Him, but saying these things creates a deep, sweet emotion that other words don’t bring, because they are the shanta rasa.

So, this is the difference between rasa and rasovaisah. This is how they have been divided. In Sanskrit, *raasa* means *rasaanaama samooha* – a combination of rasas being awoken. Literature accepts the existence of nine kinds of rasas, but here, the prema-Guru manifests the tenth kind of rasa – prema rasa – the enriching sweet emotion of pure love. Don’t make the mistake of thinking that prema rasa does not have the other nine rasas in it. It contains all the other rasas.

What didn’t the Maha Raas contain? However, before listening, a foundation has to be built to make you eligible to hear it. The Maha Raas had dancing, and it had music. The gopis held Shri Krishna’s hands as they danced together. The *dundubhi* (kettle drums of the Devtas) played above as the Devtas showered celestial flowers on Shri Krishna and the gopis.

Your dancing does not have this anand. This was a *divya* (divine) *aananda* (bliss) that is described in these five chapters called ‘Raas Panchadhyayi’. The Devtas gathered overhead in their air planes, to watch this Maha Raas. They were praying, ‘Next time, let us not be born in Swarga (Heaven). May we do sadhana so that our next birth is in Vraja (the area around Vrindavan) among the gopis. May we also get the good fortune of participating in this Raas, which is the real rasa.’

So, *rasaa naama samooha*. A combination of all rasas. People like you and I can only imagine the kind of ecstasy the gopis felt. Just listening to its description gives us such joy; how intense their joy must have been! The joy we feel by listening to this episode allows us to form some idea of the divine bliss felt by the gopis who danced with Shri Krishna.

Although this is not given in the Bhagwat, other books say that Bhagwan Shiva participated in the Maha Raas. Bhagwan Shankar is called ‘Bhole Baba’ (because he is easily propitiated). He is the *jagat guru* – the Guru of the whole world. This raas is called the ‘Maha Raas’ because Bhagwan Shankar participated in it.

The preachers of Vraja go so far as to say that the Brahmavidya (knowledge of the Brahman) was doing sadhana in the Himalayas. Someone asked, ‘What is the goal of your sadhana? Why have you undertaken this asceticism in the Himalaya?’ Maharajji has spoken about this. When he spoke on bhakti, he would be a little sarcastic about Vedanta. It seemed as though some great Saraswati (the goddess of learning) was

speaking. So, someone asked Brahmavidya what she wanted to obtain through her efforts.

‘I want to have the experience of the Satya, of the Paramatma.’

‘What is the use of doing sadhana here? Go to Vrindavan! That Satya – the Paramatma – is dancing with the gopis there.’

Do you know how this was interpreted? It is said that Brahmavidya became Radha Rani and joined in the Maha Raas. She obtained Prabhu in the Maha Raas. Radha Rani is Brahmavidya.

The Shastras have divided *vidyaa* (knowledge/understanding) into two parts – *vidyaa* and *avidya*. This is stated in the Ramcharitmanas, and also in the Bhagwat. Avidya binds the jeeva to worldly factors. And, who is Vidya (the knowledge that liberates)? It is Janakiji, it is Radha Rani, and it is Durgaji. This is the *saguna* (with attributes) *saakaara* (with form) form of Vidya. It is she who manifests as Durgaji and as Mother Janaki.

The rasa of the Maha Raas was no ordinary rasa. It was not the common desire of people who dance and sing. The gopis gave up everything for this rasa, but it was nothing worldly that they desired.

What is the ‘everything’ that the gopis sacrificed? It was the four *purushaartha* (the highest human achievements) – Artha (worldly wealth), Dharma, Kama (fulfillment of worldly desires) and Moksha (liberation).

What does ‘giving up Dharma’ mean?

The answer is described. When Shri Krishna played His flute, the gopis were serving their families. What happened was that when they heard the flute they became incapable of staying away from Shri Krishna. They set off towards the bank of the Jamuna. That was their *tyaaga* (giving up) of their Dharma. It was not that they chose to give up doing their Dharma; the sound of Shri Krishna’s flute drew them inexorably towards Him. It is an offence when we choose to avoid doing our duty, but it is not an offence when this happens because of *prabhu pre`ma* (love for Prabhu).

The gopis’ leaving their homes and families was the tyaga of all their worldly possessions. Their giving up of everything a woman desires; it was the tyaga of Kama.

Some gopis were bathing when they heard the irresistible call of Shri Krishna’s flute. They set off towards Him without even dressing up properly. What does that indicate? Had this been a dance that contained sensual desire, no heroine would go in such a state of disarray.

The original text says, ‘*Vyatyastavastraabharanaa.*’ The garments and jewelry of the gopis were all askew. They applied *kaajala* (myrrh) in one eye, and forgot to put it in the other eye, and they came to the bank of the Jamuna.

And Moksha? The gopis are divided into four age groups. The mature ones are called ‘*praudhaa*’. Some of them were serving their husbands when the flute started playing. This episode in the Bhagwat has a deep metaphysical significance. These gopis stopped serving their husbands. It was not that they stopped by choice; they were simply unable to continue!

Moksha. Our Sanatana Dharma says that a woman gets Moksha by serving her husband devotedly. So, the gopis' Dharma, Artha, Kama and Moksha were all given up. Listen carefully, and keep in mind the fact that the gopis' tyaga was not for any other. The very fruit for which Dharma, Artha, Kama and Moksha are desired is what this tyaga was for. And, the gopis attained their goal – Bhagwan.

So, this is the Raas that is described in the five chapters called the 'Raas Panchadhyayi.' Our Shri Maharajji used to say that just as there are five *praana* (the life spirit is composed of five kinds of wind) in a human body, these are the *pranas* of the Shrimad Bhagwat. The Shrimad Bhagwat is the *vaangmaya svarooopa* (the verbal form) of Shri Krishna. '*Te`ne`yam vaanga mayee moortee pratyakshaa vartate` hare`*,' and the Raas Panchadhyayi is the five *pranas* of this verbal image of Shri Krishna.

What is the value of a *vigraha* (body) that has no life? You understand what *vigraha* is, don't you? *Vigraha* means the gross body. What would happen if there was no life in your physical form?

Your body is valuable only so long as it is alive. What value will it have, once life leaves it? Where will you be taken then? Nobody will want to keep your lifeless body in the house for even two days. They will say, 'Let us take him.' Yes! What will the '*Raama naama*' be? (It is customary to chant '*Raama naama satya hai*' when taking a corpse to the crematorium. The meaning is that the name of Rama is the ultimate reality; the truth that can never be negated.) You are all silent because you are reluctant to say it! No need to say it, but this is what will happen, because a body that has no life has no value.

In the same way, these five chapters are the five *pranas* of the Shrimad Bhagwat, and the Shrimad Bhagwat is the verbal form of Shri Krishna. If you can grasp the metaphysical significance of the Raas Panchadhyayi, you are certain to obtain *prema* for Shri Krishna.

When the Gita Press planned to publish the Shrimad Bhagwat with a Hindi translation, they had an advisory panel. Our Shri Maharajji was on this panel. Before he became a *Sanyasi*, he had another name. One panel member, who was very learned, expressed doubt about the advisability of including the Raas Panchadhyayi. 'Instead of obtaining Krishna *prema*, it is possible that sensual desire may be awoken in some people. Why don't we just leave out these five chapters? The common people are ignorant about the Bhagwat. They don't know how many chapters there are in this canto.'

The situation is little better today. That is why preachers say what they like, knowing that the public is ignorant about the Bhagwat.

Our Maharajji said, 'If you take away the Raas Panchadhyayi from the Shrimad Bhagwat, what will be left in it? If people are unable to understand the mystical significance of this *leela*, it does not mean that we remove it altogether. People should be shown that they need to cultivate the eligibility to understand it by doing *sadhana*.'

How much *sadhana* was done by the gopis! They did a month-long *vrata* (ritual worship) of *Katyayini Devi*. They woke up at four o'clock every morning in the cold, even though they were only little girls. The words used here are '*Nandavraja*

kumaarika’. In Sanskrit, the word ‘kumarika’ is used for girls between five and ten years old. Girls between eleven and fifteen are called ‘*paungada*’ and a girl of seventeen is in her ‘*yuvaavasthaa*’ (youth). The commentators have established the word ‘kumari’. This word reveals that these gopis were hardly four or five years old. And, do you know how old Shri Krishna was at the time of the Maha Raas? All the details are given in the Bhagwat. Doubts arise because people don’t read these details carefully. When the gopis were five, Shri Krishna was eight years old. He had lifted the Govardhan Mountain when He was seven. He was six years old when the gopis did the Katyayani *poojaa* (ritual worship), and He was eight when He did the Maha Raas on the night of the Sharad Purnima – the brightest full moon of the year. So, where the boy is eight, and the girls are only six years old – and the girls have attained the summit of divine worship – can such children be overcome with lust? The exuberance of their deep enriching emotions is called the ‘Maha Raas’. Even today, if girls of six dance with a boy of eight, it is impossible to imagine sensual desires being aroused.

One purpose of this description is to remove our *bhraanti* (false impression). The young gopis do the vrata. Note the other factor about the gopis – their intense aspiration! After worshipping Katyayani Devi every morning, the only *varadaana* (boon) they asked for is to get Shri Krishna as their husband. ‘*Kaatyaayani mahaamaaye` mahaayoginyadheeshvari, Nandagopasutam de`vi pati me` kuru te` namaha*. O Mother Katyayani, you are all powerful. I have faith that you can do anything. Please let the son of Nanda Baba be my husband.’ What tremendous faith these little girls of five had! The day we have such faith in Bhagwan, bhakti will manifest in us. We can’t get such bhakti until we have such complete faith in Bhagwan.

‘Well, little girls, what do you want?’

‘You know the son of Nanda Baba.....’ the word they used is ‘*chhuraa*’ – a rustic word for ‘boy’. And remember, they are talking about Shri Krishna, who is the Master of the world, and for whom nothing is impossible. *Akhila brahmaanandanaayaka kartum akartum anyathaa kartum samarthe`*. The gopis know nothing about Shri Krishna being the Ishwara. They call Him ‘the *chhuraa* of Nanda Baba.’ They prayed, ‘May we get him as our husband.’

How simple and straightforward these gopis were! On the path of the Ishwara, the more simple and straightforward we are, the faster we progress. Why was Arjuna so successful? Our Gurudev used to say that the meaning of the word ‘arjuna’ according to Nirukta, is ‘straightforward’. So, see the qualities of these gopis of Vraja. Their only desire is to obtain Shri Krishna. They don’t even want anything from Him. This kind of single-minded aspiration is not easy to find.

‘May we get the son of Nanda Baba as our husband,’ they prayed, every day of the month-long ritual of worship. When we pray, we generally ask Bhagwan to grant us something we desire. ‘Prabhu, let this happen; let that happen.’ And, if the prayer is not granted, people stop offering food to Bhagwan! This is our *sakaama* (with selfish desire) bhakti. Just see the spiritual level of the gopis, and compare it to your own! We are in class 1 or class 2 of bhakti, and yet we make comments on what the gopis did! How foolish of us! How pathetic we are! It is like a child of class 1 saying that

the senior professor knows nothing! That would be the child's foolishness, and our state is much the same.

Just see the single minded devotion of these little gopis of five and six – *anyaa shravano tyaagyaa*. They did not seek anyone else's help, and they asked for only one thing – to obtain Prabhu! Dhruv was also a bhakta, but he asked Prabhu for worldly benefits. Gajendra was also a bhakta, but he asked Prabhu for Mukti (liberation). Draupadi was also a bhakta but she asked to be protected from the wicked.

But what did the gopis ask for, my brother? They never asked for any benefit for their families, or even that they should always be with Shri Krishna. They did not go to Mathura when Shri Krishna went there. Why not? What a life theirs was! What an amazing outlook and what character! And, do you know what the result of all this was? They undertook a month's ritual. The mantra they used is prevalent even today. Even today, many young girls chant this mantra to get a good husband. However, what was the result of the gopis' worship?

There is a proper order in the method the fruit of sadhana is bestowed. The order is that when Katyayani Devi was worshipped, and the worship pleased her, she should have manifested and granted the boon to the gopis. This is the rule; this is the norm. However, our Gurudev used to say that the gopis' worship was so successful that Shri Krishna came even before Katyayani Devi could come! The fervor of the gopis' prayer was such that Shri Krishna did not wait for the proper order of giving them the fruit of their sadhana.

You will read in the Bhagwat that on the last day of the vrata, Shri Krishna went and stole the gopis' clothes while they bathed in the Jamunaji. This episode is called the 'Cheerharan Leela' (the frolic of stealing the gopis' clothes). People cast aspersions on this leela. Oh, had Shri Krishna wanted, He could have stolen them any day! However, He went on the last day of the ritual. He knew where the gopis went for their daily bath. The gopis would take off their clothes, leaving them on the bank while they bathed. Shri Krishna never went there before. He went only on the last day of their worship.

And even on that day, Shri Krishna did not go alone. He went with the whole group of His friends. You can pick up the Bhagwat and check. Our Gurudev would explain every episode fully. He would say, 'Look; Janakiji also worshipped Gauri (to get Shri Rama as her husband), and her worship was also successful. '*Khasi maala moorati musakaanee*' (Gauri's image smiled and her garland dropped, as a blessing). But there is a difference between that episode and this one. Gauri gave her blessings that Janakiji would get the husband she had prayed for – '*Manu jaahi rache`n milihi so baru sahaja sundara saanvaro.*'

And here? Mother Katyayani never came to the gopis to grant a boon. It is possible that she would have manifested when the ritual was completed. Normally, the Devta who is worshipped manifests after the ritual is completed successfully. Here, however, He – who the gopis prayed for – came even before the ritual worship was completed. So, even had Devi Katyayani come, what purpose would it have served? I am sure that Katyayani Devi would have come, since the worship was successful. It is not possible that she would have not Graced the gopis. But, after all, Katyayani

Devi is also a *shakti* (power) of that very same Shri Krishna! Maharajji would say, ‘It was the Devi who should have come, but the Deva came instead! And, He picked up their garments, put them on His shoulder, and climbed on to a kadamba tree.’ This is amazing!

Jeev Goswami has written a comment here, ‘That Paramatma, who sits on the lotus heart of great Mahatmas whose minds are completely pure, has taken the cast-off garments of the gopis and put them on His shoulder.’ You can imagine the elevated spiritual level of the gopis! This is the same Paramatma Shri Krishna! He climbed up a kadamba tree carrying the gopis’ clothes on His shoulder. Not only that, He joked with them!

When the gopis finished their bath they began to look for their clothes. They saw the *gvaala baala* (cowherd boys) standing there. They guessed that the Master of the boys would soon be coming. Then they looked up and saw Shri Krishna sitting high up on a branch of a kadamba tree, smiling at them. The gopis pleaded with Him to give them back their clothes, since they were shivering with cold.

Bhagwan Shri Krishna was teasing them. If a Mahapurush jokes with someone, that person is considered to be very fortunate. Saints do not laugh and joke with just anyone. It is only with those they feel close to, the bhaktas of Bhagwan, with whom they enjoy chatting. Bhagwan Shri Krishna was joking with the gopis. It is written clearly in the original shlokas of the Bhagwat. Shri Krishna said, ‘Gopis, you know that since I have come to Vraja, I have never spoken a single untruth.’

Do you accept this statement? Can you believe it, when Shri Krishna says that He never told lies? He was telling the gopis that He had never spoken a single lie, when it is their experience that He lied to them every day!

Shri Krishna would steal butter every day. On one hand He would ask for butter and on the other hand, He would also steal butter! Bhagwan Shri Krishna’s statement about His never telling lies is not to be believed. You can believe it if Shri Rama says it, but – Shri Krishna?! They are both the same, but Shri Rama is the *maryaadaa purushottama* (the personification of Dharma) and Shri Krishna is the *leelaa purushottama* (the personification of frolic).

A Mahatma of Vraja pointed out that if you see the first words spoken by Shri Krishna in the tenth canto of the Bhagwat, they are a lie – ‘*Naaham bhakshitavaanamba sarve`mithyaabhishansinah.*’ The episode is when Shri Krishna was very small, and He ate some mud! Balaramji complained to Mother Yashoda, who came at once. She asked, threateningly, ‘Did you eat mud?’ Shri Krishna began to tremble with fright. He is the Ishwara who Time itself fears! Shri Krishna’s eyes filled with tears, and He lied out of fear! ‘Maiya, I did not eat mud.’

‘All the boys say you did eat mud,’ said Maiya. ‘Are they all lying?’

‘*Maiyaa, sarve`mithyaa bhishansinah.* They are all telling lies.’

So many people are seated here. If one person were to claim that only he is speaking the truth and all others are lying, what will it mean? It will mean that he is lying, and what everyone is saying is true.

So, what does that indicate? Shri Krishna told the gopis, ‘Gopis, you all know that I have never uttered a lie.’ What were the gopis to say? They all kept quiet. They were all familiar with Shri Krishna’s habitual lies!

‘All right, Prabhu. You may speak the truth or You may tell lies. What do You want to convey?’

‘I will not give you back your clothes until you come out of the water,’ said Shri Krishna. This is how He frolicked with them.

The gopis had different kinds of temperaments. The ones who had the temperament of a Brahmin said, ‘Lala, Your father never did anything like this. What You are doing is not proper.’

Shri Krishna remained silent.

The gopis whose temperament was like Kshatriyas (the warrior caste) threatened, ‘Lala, we will report you to the Raja unless You return our clothes at once!’

Kanhaiya smiled. ‘Which Raja will you report Me to, gopis?’ He asked.

Just think of the superior quality of the gopis’ sadhana! The one for whom they prayed for has appeared before them. He is smiling at them and teasing them!

‘Tell Me, gopis, to which Raja will you complain about Me? Will you complain to Nanda Baba, since he is the Raja of Vraja? If you report Me to him, I have nothing to fear. I sit on his shoulder and tug at his moustache and hair. And if you complain to Kansa, who is the Raja of Mathura, well – he is destined to die after a few months. If he comes here, I will kill him even sooner! So, to which Raja will you complain? Both are Rajas, but it will not help you to complain to either.’

Some gopis had the temperament of a Vaishya (trader caste). ‘Shyam Sunder,’ they said, ‘O friend, O Kanhaiya!’ These gopis spoke with *pranaya kopa* (a lover’s anger). There is an ordinary anger, and there is the anger of a lover. There are many fights even where there is a lot of love. There is a *rasa* in lover’s quarrels. These gopis said, ‘Those gopis threatened to complain to the Raja in a spurt of anger that was born out of their love for You. We have offered up our lives to You, Kanhaiya! We were doing the vrata to obtain You. It is Your Grace, Your compassion, that You came to us even before Katyayani Devi granted us the Boon we prayed for, and You accepted us. We will obey You, whatever You tell us to do, because this life of ours belongs to You. *Shyaama sundara te` daasyah*. We are Your servants, Kanhaiya. Our life is surrendered to You. We will obey You.’

This episode is an episode of *poorna samarpana* (complete offering up of themselves). Both the Cheer Haran Leela and the Maha Raas reveal the gopis’ total surrender. Unless and until a person surrenders himself or herself completely to Bhagwan, there is no entry into the Maha Raas for them. You can look up the original text of the Shrimad Bhagwat. The words used are absolutely theoretical, because it is written by Veda Vyasa, who is an Avatar of Bhagwan.

When that gopi said, ‘*Shyaama sundara te` daasyaah*’ to Shri Krishna, He knew they were shivering with cold. He said just one thing, ‘*Bhavatyoyadi me` daasyah*.’ This is the word used in the main text. Pujya Ramkinkarji Maharaj used to say that some words are the *praana* (life spirit) of a sentence. This word is the prana of this shloka (Sanskrit verse) – *bhavatyoyadi me` daasya*. ‘Gopis, if you are indeed My servitors, if you have truly surrendered your lives to Me, then your lives belong to Me. You should do what I say. You should have no opinion and no demand.’

If a person sells his horse or car to somebody, it is the responsibility of the new owner to look after it, isn’t it? So, when the gopis heard Shri Krishna’s words, they

came out of the water. They bowed before Bhagwan. He gave them their garments and called them 'Sati' (a wife who has total devotion for her husband).

Do you know that the original text of the Bhagwat uses the word '*saadhavee*' (a saintly woman) for the gopis? '*Sankalpo viditah saadhvyo.*' Bhagwan uses words like *sadhvi* and *sati* for the gopis. 'O Satis, O Sadhvis, I had understood your *sankalpa* (resolve) the very day you started your ritual worship.'

'Then will You fulfill our *sankalpa*?'

'Yes. Your wish will be granted.'

'When will it be fulfilled?'

'I will fulfill the resolve of your heart in the nights to come.'

What does that indicate? If somebody worships Gauri – Katyayani is Gauri – they obtain Prabhu. And, what was the boon they prayed for? It was, '*Nanda gopa sutam de`vee patim me` kurute` namah.* Devi, let the son of Nanda be my husband. I bow down to you.'

They prayed to get Shri Krishna as their husband, and Shri Krishna tells them, 'I will fulfill your resolve.' That means, 'You will get Me as your husband in the days ahead.'

Now, if Bhagwan does the Maha Raas with those same gopis, is it not a matter of intense *dharma nishthaa* (faith in doing one's Dharma)? Can it be called an aberration of Dharma? You will find that everything I am telling you is written in the Bhagwat. If you read the shlokas attentively, you will find it all written there. Doubts arise because people fail to read or hear the authentic rendering.

The other point is that Shri Krishna had not yet done the Maha Raas. He told the gopis, 'Go to your homes now.' And, what is the test of their *samarpana*? The gopis did not question Shri Krishna. They did not ask, 'You have just made us a promise. When will You fulfill it?'

Why didn't they ask? Having given their lives to Shri Krishna, it was no longer their concern where He keeps them or how He keeps them. This is their *poorna samarpana*.

Had this Maha Raas been an ordinary leela, Bhagwan would have called Kubja and even Putana; but this was no ordinary leela. These were the gopis, Maharaj! Yes! It is said that there were our kinds of gopis who participated in the Maha Raas. They were *shrutiroopaa* (the forms of the Shrutis – Vedic verses), *smritiroopaa* (the forms of the Smritis – the words of enlightened Mahatmas), *rishiroopaa* (the forms of the Rishis who had felt attracted to Bhagwan), and the *saadhanroopaa* (those who had succeeded in their sadhana).

The Shrutis – it is our belief that the shlokas of the Vedas assumed the forms of gopis, when Bhagwan wanted their divine rasa to be manifested as the Raas. Shri Krishna did the Maha Raas with them. These were the Shrutirupa gopis.

What about the Rishirupa gopis? Our Maharajji had said, in his discourse on the Ramayana – I forget where it was held – that Bhagwan Shri Rama was so captivating that when He went into the forest, He stole the hearts of many great Rishis. 'Had we been given female forms, we would have married Shri Rama,' they thought. These Rishis were born as gopis in the Dwapara age, when Bhagwan came as Shri Krishna. These were the Rishirupa gopis.

The third kind was the Nityasiddha gopis. They came along with Shri Krishna's household, when He came down from Goloka. Included in this category are Vishakha, Lalita, Madhvi, Chandravali and others. Whenever Bhagwan takes an Avatar, they also come down to the earth, and when He vanishes from the earth, they go back to Goloka with Him. These are the gopis of the Nityasiddha category.

The fourth kind – the Sadhansiddha – are the ones I have told you about; the little girls who did the puja of Katyayani Devi. So, of all the gopis who participated in the Maha Raas, there is a group of little girls who had done the vrata of Katyayani Devi. This is how it is explained that some gopis were serving their husbands. These were the Nityasiddha, who were older.

One more question was raised. It is a serious point. The commentators said, 'If Bhagwan Shri Krishna was a child of eight, and the gopis were old enough to have husbands and sons, how did they obtain the rasa of the Maha Raas?'

For these older gopis, Bhagwan manifested as being their age. This is a *poorna raasa* (a Raas that is whole; complete). Shri Krishna manifested in as many forms as the number of gopis. There was one Shri Krishna with every gopi. Each gopi had a Shri Krishna of her own age.

So, good people, these are the four kinds of gopis, Nityasiddha, and Sadhansiddha. This is a divine leela, and you must always keep one thing in mind: if you obtain rasa in this episode, consider it to be Bhagwan's Grace. And if doubts crop up in your mind, pray to Bhagwan, 'Please elevate my mental level to enable me to savor the rasa of this leela of Yours. Please let my life be saturated with this divine leela of Yours.'

(Discourse of the second day)

We are discussing the episode of the Maha Raas, which is the prana of the Shrimad Bhagwat. Bhagwan Shyam Sunder blessed the gopis of Vraja, promising to fulfill their resolve. '*Sankalpo viditah saadhvyo*. I know about your sankalpa, and I will fulfill it.' In the Cheer Haran leela, it is stated clearly that He said He would do the Maha Raas in the nights ahead.

The gopis had been granted their wish after doing the Katyayani puja. Prabhu was pleased with their worship. He had told the gopis, 'Go back to your homes now.' The gopis had not questioned His decision. They did not say, 'Which are the nights when You will do the Maha Raas with us?' They had surrendered themselves completely to Him. Now it was up to Him what He wished.

After that episode are the episodes of the Brahamanpatnis – the wives of the Brahmins of Mathura, the lifting of the Govardhan Mountain – the Giriraj – and going to the realm of Varun Devta. All these come after the Cheer Haran leela, and before the Maha Raas. It is from these episodes that we can guess that Shri Krishna was about six when He granted the gopis their boon. The Bhagwat states clearly, '*Yah saptahaayano baalah*. Who lifted the Giriraj? It was the seven year old son of Nanda.' The worship of Katyayani Devi was done before this, and the Maha Raas was done after.

Jeev Goswami has based his estimate of Prabhu's age on this episode. He says that Prabhu would have been eight years old when He did the Maha Raas after He had done the other leelas.

And, all the other leelas, like the Giriraj, Kaliya Nag, going to Varun loka, destroying Aghasura, and removing Brahmaji's illusion, etc are the preparations for the Maha Raas. Our revered Gurudev used to say that Prabhu showed Brahmaji that He was not merely the son of Nanda, He was the Paramatma incarnate. Brahmaji's illusion was dispelled. Bhagwan subdued the Kaliya Nag, showing the world that He was no ordinary child; He was the Paramatma incarnate. Kaliya's venom was so strong that its fumes killed the birds that flew overhead. Just think of a six year old dancing on its hoods! No human child could do it; this was possible only for the Paramatma. Thus, Bhagwan established His divinity before doing the Maha Raas.

Shri Krishna had not only lifted up the Giriraj, He had held it aloft for seven days on the little finger of His left hand. Could an ordinary seven year old do this? Today's young men can't even lift up a quintal of weight. The road that goes around the Giriraj was seven *kosa* – twenty one kilometers. It is there even today. Even today people go round the Giriraj and do its darshan (see with reverence). Both *sakaama* (with selfish desires) and *nishkaama* (without selfish desires) bhaktas obtain their heart's desire from the Giriraj.

So, is it possible for any ordinary seven year old to hold up the Giriraj on his little finger for seven days? Absolutely not! By doing these leelas, Bhagwan built up the background for the divine Maha Raas. These were the indications that the only one who can do the Maha Raas is the one who can dance on the hoods of the Kaliya Nag, hold up the Giriraj, go to other realms, and be worshipped by Varun, Indra, and other Devtas.

That means Prabhu organized an order of events to demonstrate that He was no ordinary mortal; He was Bhagwan. For whom did He do this? He could have done the Maha Raas much earlier, had He so desired. If He could do it at the age of eight, He could do it at the age of five. He could have done so, but He didn't. Why not? It is because He wanted people like you and me to understand who He is. He wanted to show us that no one but the Bhagwan can do all these miraculous feats. And, if even after this we fail to understand, what can Bhagwan do? That is why Shukadevji has described Bhagwan's leelas in such detail.

It was made clear to Brahmaji that Shri Krishna is the Paramatma. Indra – the King of the Devtas – was made to realize that Shri Krishna is the Paramatma. When the people of Vraja saw Him defeat the Kaliya Nag and lift up the Giriraj, they saw clearly that Shri Krishna is the Paramatma. This could not be the frolic of any human child.

Only after all this did Shri Krishna do the Maha Raas. Somebody asked our Maharajji, 'If Bhagwan Shri Krishna did the Maha Raas, why can't we do it?' 'Bhagwan first danced on the hoods of Kaliya,' said Maharajji. 'Only after that did He do the Raas leela. If you dance on a serpent's hood, I will give your permission to do the Raas leela.'

Dance on a serpent?! We'd forget all about Raas if we even saw a serpent! Who could think of dancing on its head? Oh, forget the Kaliya Nag; today's children scream and flee if they see a lizard or a large ant!

Therefore, good people, He who dances on the hoods of the Kaliya Nag does the Raas leela, and this is why we read and listen to the Raas Panchadhyayi.

Do you know what the first word of the first shloka of the Raas Panchadhyayi is? '*Bhagavaanapi taa raatreeh sharadotfullamullikaah, veekshya rantum manashchakre` yogamaayaamupaashrita (10. 29. 1).*' 'Bhagwan'! The very first word is 'Bhagwan'. Keep in mind that it is Bhagwan who is doing this leela. The son of Nanda is Bhagwan, the boy who steals butter is Bhagwan, and the one who stole the gopis' garments is Bhagwan.

Who is called 'Bhagwan'? Bhagwan is one who has six supreme characteristics. He has *poorna gnaana* (complete Gnan), *poorna vairagya* (complete detachment), *poorna dharma* (complete righteousness), *poorna yasha* (complete fame), *poorna shree* (complete grace and prosperity) and *poorna anuraaga* (complete love). Bhagwan is the one who has these six attributes. He has poorna vairagya as well as poorna anurag. It is a characteristic of the Ishwara to have conflicting attributes – '*paraspara viruddha dharmashrayatra.*' Shri Krishna is completely detached and His love is complete.

You may question this, but look at His life. He put in so much effort to marry His *pataraanee* (principal Queens). It is a separate matter that He is the Bhagwan and can do anything. The fact remains that He did put in a considerable effort to win His Patranis. You will see that not a single marriage of Shri Krishna took place at His in-law's place. He abducted His brides – some with their consent and some at His own wish – and the marriage ceremonies were held at Dwarka. He loved His Patranis so much that He abducted and married them, and had children by them. He loved His children dearly. He would take them on His lap and play with them. He also arranged

for their marriages. He killed Asuras (Demons) to save them. But, when it was time to bring His Avatar to an end, the same Bhagwan Shri Krishna had total detachment. He resolved that His entire clan should be destroyed. Who made this resolve? It was the same Shri Krishna!

Brahmaji prayed to Shri Krishna. ‘Prabhu, Your time on this earth is almost over. It is time for You to return to Your own land.’

‘You are right, Brahmaji,’ said Shri Krishna. ‘However, there is something left to be accomplished before I leave.’

‘What is left to be done, Prabhu?’

‘The earth is almost relieved of her burden.’ The word ‘*praayah*’ – almost – is used here. ‘My clan, the Yaduvanshis, will become a burden on this earth after My departure. They have great powers. As long as I am here, their powers are used for good. However, when I am no longer on this earth, they will misuse their powers. Power is beneficial when it is attached to the Ishwara, but it becomes negative when this connection is broken. I will come after the Yaduvanshis have been destroyed.’

So, this is poorna vairagya – a complete lack of attachment – in Bhagwan. He inspired the Mahatmas to give a *shraapa* (curse) to the Yaduvanshis, and the whole clan was destroyed. The description in the Bhagwat is that Shri Krishna sat under a Peepal tree, in His four-armed form, His legs stretched out with one foot crossed over the other. Is He grave? Is He weeping? Nothing of the sort. Neither is He weeping, nor is He serious. It is written there, that He has a slight smile on His face.

Just imagine the situation. He had seen the children He loved so dearly die before His very eyes. He was leaving behind His Patranis who He loved so much. His whole clan was destroyed, quarreling among themselves and killing each other. And, this is Shyam Sunder, whose smile is the same. This is total non-attachment. This is the characteristic of Bhagwan. ‘*Paraspara virodha dharmashrayatva.*’

Shukadevji Maharaj tells Raja Parikshit, ‘Rajan, the leela of the Maha Raas is a leela of the Ishwara category. It is not a frolic done by human beings. A human being can listen to it, and do sadhana to make himself eligible to enter it, but he cannot behave in the same way.’

We should listen to the discourses of this leela. We should describe it, and we should do sadhana. Great Mahatmas have done sadhana and obtained the essence of the gopis. They could enter into the spirit of the Maha Raas. Good people, this is the Maha Raas that even Brahmaji longs to experience and even Uddhavji longs to join.

When Uddhav returned from Vraja, he prayed to Prabhu, ‘Prabhu, let me be born once more.’

‘Why Uddhav? What more do you want? You have already obtained Me.’ Uddhav was Shri Krishna’s adviser and friend. Shri Krishna asked him why he wanted to be born again, since he had already obtained the Ishwara.

‘Thakurji, give me a birth in Vrindavan.’

‘As what? As a gopi, or a gwaal-baal?’

‘No. Make me a plant, creeper, or tree.’ Just think of Uddhav’s mental state. Imagine his feelings.

‘What purpose will that serve, Uddhav?’

‘Kanhaiya, these gopis of Vraja are Your *pre`mee* – they have pure love for You. The love of the gopis and gwaal-baal is sincere and selfless. I have never seen such love in my life. When I see them, I feel that it would be so good if I became a plant in Vrindavan, and became covered by the dust of their feet as they passed by! If that happens, I will get Krishnaprema. I would be able to love You the way they do.’

Good people, this is the Maha Raas, which even Uddhav and Brahmaji long for. They want to be given a birth in Vraja. This is why it is said that this is no ordinary leela. This is the prana of the Shrimad Bhagwat.

Shukadevji Maharaj says, ‘*Bhagavaanapi taa raatreeh sharadotfullamullikaah, veekshya rantum manashchakre` yogamaayaamupaashritah.*’ Bhagavan *api* (also) made a sankalpa. Why did Shukadevji add the word ‘*api*’? You see, the gopis had already made the sankalpa for the Maha Raas. They reiterated it every moment. ‘When will that moment come, when we get Shyam Sunder? When will that moment come, when He does the Maha Raas with us?’ Every moment of the gopis was filled with this thought. Every breath they took was filled with this resolve. This was what they hoped for and what they waited for. But neither did they say anything, nor did they do anything to make it happen. They had given themselves completely to Bhagwan Shri Krishna.

Just imagine the state of the gopis. Our Maharajji used to tell us that between the time of Bhagwan’s giving the varadan, and His doing the Maha Raas, there was a gap of a year and half or two years. Throughout this period, Shri Krishna was at Vrindavan, and so were the gopis. They would meet Him every morning when He took the cows out to graze in the forest; and again in the evening when He returned. Blessed is the absolute surrender of the gopis! Not a single gopi mentioned it even once to Shri Krishna. No one asked, ‘Kanhaiya, when will You fulfill the varadan You gave us?’ This is complete surrender! What was the gopi’s mental level? If we meditate on this, perhaps we can imagine the state of their mind. Unless we are Graced by Shri Krishna or the gopis, it is not possible for ordinary people like us to attain their state of mind. If you sit and meditate on the scene, you will get a glimpse of the extent of their fortitude and dedication. They saw Shri Krishna every day; they spoke to Him, but they refrained from asking when they would obtain their heart’s desire.

That is why Shukadevji had to say ‘*api*’ here. The gopis had always wanted it, but now Shri Krishna also resolved to do the Maha Raas. *Manashchakre`*. ‘*Mana*’ means the mind, or the desire in the mind. It can also mean making a sankalpa. In saying that Prabhu made His *mana*, the question arises, ‘Didn’t Bhagwan have a *mana*?’ Oh, people say that the Brahman is Sacchidananda (Sat=pure existence, Chid=pure consciousness, Ananda=pure bliss), and the *mana* is the result of Prakriti (Bhagwan’s power of creation; Nature). If that be so, how can Bhagwan have a *mana*? He is *amana* – without mental fluctuations. This is the opinion of the Vedantis. The bhaktas say that Bhagwan did have a *mana*, but it had gone somewhere, and so He had to make it anew.

Where had Bhagwan’s *mana* gone?

It had gone to Barsane (Radha Rani’s village). It had gone to Shri Kishoriji (Radha Rani). That is why Shri Krishna had to make a new *mana* for doing the Maha Raas.

According to Sanskrit grammar, the word ‘*chakre`*’ means that the fruit of the action is given to another; not to the person who does the action. So, when Bhagwan made a new mana, what was the purpose? Our Maharajji would give absolutely novel interpretations! He said that when Bhagwan saw the complete surrender of the gopis, their simplicity and straightforwardness, He had a wish to experience the rasa of their sadhana for Himself. He wanted to share their ecstasy. ‘Let Me dance with the gopis and experience their divine bliss.’

Just think about this – Bhagwan was tempted! The bhaktas with whom Bhagwan, Himself was tempted to do leela – could they be ordinary bhaktas? *Manashchakre`*; *bhagavaanapi manashchakre`* - Bhagwan also made the sankalpa. When? *Sharadotfullamullikaa* – on the night of the Sharad Purnima, the brightest moon in the year.

There are five points to be kept in mind regarding the Maha Raas. Who did the Maha Raas, and who was it done with? Bhagwan Shri Krishna did the Maha Raas, and He did it with the gopis. When did He do the Maha Raas? On the night of the Sharad Purnima. He selected a spot of great natural beauty. Where was that? On the sandy bank of the Jamunaji. And, why did He do it? You can say that it was to fulfill the desire of the gopis, or that it was His own wish. Both are correct. It is like both Shri Krishna and the gopis were like the *chakora* (a mythological bird who is in love with the moon) and also the Chandrama (moon). Our Maharajji used to say that when there is *poorna pre`ma* (pure love that is absolute) between two people, both are the chakor and both are the Chandrama. Each desires the other. It cannot be said for sure whether Bhagwan did the Maha Raas because He wanted to experience its rasa, or whether He wanted to give the gopis its rasa. It seems it was for both reasons.

So, when did the Maha Raas take place? *Sharadotfullamullikaa* – it was in the evening, before the moon rose in the sky. It would have been at about this time. I mentioned yesterday, about the rasa I feel here. It is like being in Vrindavan. This is how we usually sit on the sandy ground for a discourse.

Prabhu saw that the jasmine flowers had blossomed and the air was filled with fragrance. At that time of the year, the weather in Vrindavan is neither very hot nor very cold. Bees hovered over the flowers. The Jamunaji gurgled softly, as though inviting Prabhu. ‘Shyam Sunder, it is time for the Maha Raas.’

All the shrubs and creepers were covered with soft dewdrops. Seeing all this beauty, Shri Krishna thought of the gopis.

Jeev Goswami says, ‘Blessed are the gopis!’ If a place and time are very beautiful, it is natural for us to think about the one we love. We feel, ‘How nice it would have been had he/she been here!’ The gopis are so fortunate that Bhagwan Shri Krishna thought about them when He saw the beautiful scene.

‘Oh, so much time has gone by since I promised the gopis that I would fulfill their desire,’ thought Shri Krishna. ‘The gopis have never even reminded Me about the boon I granted. How simple and straightforward they are! Their love for Me is absolutely pure.’ Shri Krishna decided that it was time to make their sankapla come true.

What did He do? ‘*Yogamaayaamupaashritah*’. Yes! Yogamaya. The word ‘*yoga-maayaa*’ is interpreted in many ways. The first meaning is, Radha Rani, Shri Kishoriji.

Shri Radha Rani is not mentioned by name in the Shrimad Bhagwat, but there are many indications. You may, some day, listen to a discourse that refers to the laghu (small) raas and the Maha Raas. When Bhagwan began the Raas, the gopis experienced some pride that they were the chosen ones, and Prabhu disappeared. There is a description that He vanished, along with one gopi, leaving the others behind. Who was the gopi Prabhu took with Him? It was Shri Kishoriji. It was none other than Shri Radha Rani. There are many episodes that refer to her, including the Bhramar Geet and the Gopi Geet. So, Yoga Maya means Kishoriji. The word Maya, in Sanskrit, has two meaning: one is *kripaa* (Grace) and the other is *dambha* (pretense) – *maayaa kripaayaam dambhicha*.

‘Dambha’ means to display and maya means to pretend. And the other meaning is kripa; to shower Grace. When we accept that Maya means Grace, then you know the name of Shri Krishna’s Grace, don’t you? *Krishnakripaa* - the Grace of Bhagwan Shri Krishna – is Shri Kishoriji. Shri Radha Rani is Shri Krishna’s Grace incarnate. They say that we cannot obtain Prabhu unless we have His Grace. That means, we can’t obtain Prabhu until Shri Kishoriji wants it. Once Shri Kishoriji showers Grace on us, Bhagwan Shri Krishna is bound to accept us. He accepts us without a second thought. Whatever the child may be like, once he surrenders at the feet of the Mother, she will plead for him and the Father will accept him.

So, Kishoriji is Yoga Maya. Maya means kripa, and here kripa means Kishoriji. Very well, we accept that kripa means Kishoriji. What does Yoga mean? ‘*Yogaaya yaa maayaa saa*.’ Yoga means to join, to connect. It means, ‘She, who has taken an Avatar to connect us to Shri Krishna.’ ‘*Yoga maayaa mupaashritah*.’ Bhagwan Shri Krishna invited Yoga Maya.

Why did He invite Yoga Maya?

Bhagwan Shri Krishna is the essence of rasa, but if He wants to become the essence of Raas, He needs Radha Rani. Kishoriji is needed for the one to become many. ‘*Yoga maayaa mupaashritah*.’ This is why He invited Kishoriji to join Him.

Shri Radha Rani is Prabhu’s *abhinna shakti* (the power that is not separate from Him). Another meaning is – *ve`noo* – His flute, the *bansuree*.

The bansuri is a great help in the Maha Raas. The gopis came running as soon as they heard the sound of Shri Krishna’s flute. What kind of an assistant is the bansuri? And, who can be Bhagwan’s assistant? Only one who has surrendered completely to Bhagwan!

The gopis wondered what was so special about the venu, to make Bhagwan want to have her beside Him even when He slept at night. He would tuck the venu into His waistband when He set off to graze the cows in the forest. Or else, He placed her on His lips and poured His breath into her. He left behind other objects, but He never let the venu be separated from Himself. What is it that made Him love her so dearly? What had she done to win His love? ‘*Goptaha kimaacharadayam kushalam sma ve`noo*.’ This is a shloka from the ‘Venu Geet’.

‘What sadhana has this venu done, that Shri Krishna keeps her with him always?’ wondered the gopis. Our Shri Maharajji used to say that the greatest sadhana seen in the venu is that she is completely empty. A flute is hollow. Unless and until a flute is emptied completely, it will not be able to play Shri Krishna’s music. Only one who is completely empty (of the individual ego) can be fully surrendered. The breath of Thakurji is heard as the music only through that, which has been emptied of everything else. Only a bhakta who has offered himself totally to Bhagwan can help others to reach Him. That is why ‘*Yoga maayaa mupaashritah*’. Bhagwan took the help of the venu.

So, one meaning is that Yoga Maya is the venu, and another meaning is that Yoga Maya is Kishoriji. The third meaning is that Yoga Maya is Prabhu’s Leela Shakti – His power of frolic, or sport. The Vaishnavas also call Bhagwan’s Leela Shakti His Vaishnavi Shakti.

So, what did Bhagwan’s Leela Shakti do?

You will soon hear about the way the gopis ran, in whatever state they were, when they heard the sound of Shri Krishna’s flute. They were in complete disarray when they came to the sandy river bank. Some of them had not even worn their clothes properly, and some had not decorated their faces properly. They just went off as they were when they heard Shri Krishna’s flute.

However, it is described that the gopis were dressed up beautifully when the Maha Raas took place. Their faces were beautifully decorated and they were wearing jewelry. Our Gurudev says, ‘If the gopis had not dressed up before leaving their homes, where did they dress up? There was no facility for dressing up on the bank of the Jamunaji. Nor had the gopis taken anything with them. The sandy bank of the Jamunaji had no provision for any make up or elaborate dressing up. How could they have been elaborately dressed?’ The answer is that it was for this purpose that Shri Krishna had summoned His Leela Shakti. ‘You have to do what the gopis were unable to do, and help to make My Raas Leela successful.’

Thus, Bhagwan took the help of all three shaktis of His – His venu, Kishoriji, and Leela Shakti. ‘*Yoga maayaa mupaashritah*.’ And, there was yet another amazing factor. In the shloka ‘*Taah raatreeh vikshya*’ the words are used in a way that indicates that the nights were plural. The night of the Sharad Purnima is one – how can there be many nights?

Bhagwan saw all the nights that had passed in between His granting the varadan to the gopis and His doing the Maha Raas. During this period every night had hoped that the Maha Raas would take place in her tenure. On the night of the Maha Raas, all the presiding deities of the past nights came there. They stood before Bhagwan with folded hands. ‘Prabhu, we have been waiting since the day You gave the varadan to the gopis. Today, You have resolved to fulfill it. What is Your command for us?’

Shri Krishna said, ‘Merge into this night of the Sharad Purnima. Everybody’s wish will be achieved simultaneously.’ That is why it is described at the end of the episode that the night of the Sharad Purnima stretched into a six month long night. The meaning of ‘all the nights’ is, ‘the presiding deities of all the nights’.

Every object has three forms – the *aadhibhautik* (gross form), *aadhidaivik* (divine or subtle form) and *aadhyaatmika* (metaphysical form). Take Vrindavan, for instance.

We go to the Banke Bihari Mandir to do darshan (see with reverence), and to other places of interest. All these are the Adhibhautik forms of Vrindavan. The Adhidaivik form of Vrindavan can be seen by Mahatmas even today, but not by common people like us. Meera Bai and Jeev Goswami had both got the darshan. Even today, Saints see Thakur go off to graze cows along with the gwaal baal. Even today, they can hear the sound of Shri Krishna's venu. Even today, Shri Krishna does the Maha Raas at Nidhivan. This is the divine form of Vrindavan. And, the Adhyatmik form is that, in which Shri Krishna pervades every grain and particle of Vrindavan. Everything there – the moving and unmoving objects – are all forms of Shri Krishna.

Thus, every object has three forms. The presiding deities of the nights came to Shri Krishna and began to pray. 'Prabhu, please accept us, also.'

'Very well,' said Bhagwan. 'Merge into this night of the Sharad Purnima.' All the ladies (nights) became one. Prabhu achieved what He wanted.

It was time for the Chandrama (moon) to rise. Do you know what the Chandrama did? It looked as though he had spread *rolee* (vermilion) over the entire sky in the East. It was like a husband who comes home after a long time, who lovingly splashed vermilion on his wife's head. Why did he do that? Our Maharajji used to say, 'You have read all these stories. Do you know who the Chandrama is?'

He is Shri Krishna's *saalaa* (wife's brother).

How?

Both Laxmiji and the Chandrama emerged from the ocean, so they became brother and sister. Thus, Shri Krishna became the Chandrama's *be'hnoi* (sister's husband). He thought, 'Shri Krishna is embarking upon such a great event. I should extend my support.' He colored the sky red, to enhance love and romance. If you read the text you will see how beautifully the scene is described. It is natural for the sky to be rosy when the moon rises on a full moon night. That is quite normal, but here, Maharshi Vyas and Shukadevji say, 'It is as though the Chandrama has spread the roli of *anuraaga* (love) to inform Shri Krishna that the stage was set.'

'*Karaira mukham*' – as though he smeared roli on the face of the East. Kanhaiya saw. 'Oh, so the Chandrama is also absolutely ready!' Kanhaiya reached there.

Where?

On the sandy bank of the Jamuna. He stood under a Tamal tree. '*Jagao kalam vaamadrishaam manoharam*'. The word used here is '*manoharam*' – *mana haratee iti manoharaa* – the one who *hara* (steals) the *mana* (mind) is 'manohara.' That Krishna, who steals the hearts of the lovely gopis of Vraja, played the venu when He reached the sandy bank of the Jamuna.

And what did the sound of the flute do? '*Vanitaa shata yoothapaa*' – there were thousands of gopis. How many names could He call? Do you know what Bhagwan did? He used the word '*kleem*'. *Kleem* means *kalam cha madhuraa sfute*. It is very sweet to hear, but what is said is not clear. Bhagwan is Bhagwan after all. He is skilled in all the arts. When Bhagwan played 'kleem' on the venu, it was heard by all the gopis, whose every moment was filled with thoughts of their Kanhaiya. When Shri Radha heard it, she thought the venu was saying 'Radha'. Lalita thought it was her name that Shri Krishna was playing, and Vishakha heard her name being called out.

Every gopi felt that Kanhaiya was playing her name on the venu. They felt that the moment they had longed for had arrived, and Shri Krishna was calling her. Shri Krishna was their life. They had longed for Him to call. Just enter into the realm of their feelings, and get a feel of their mental condition. Their spiritual level was so elevated that they set of instantly to meet Shri Krishna.

Even ordinary people like us would not hesitate to go, if we felt that Shri Krishna was calling us. Is there anyone who would not go to Him at once, if called? 'My Thakur is calling me! The object of my worship is calling me!' Who would be able to hold back? Nobody can control himself when Bhagwan calls him. The *karme`ndriya* (organs of action) and the *gnaane`ndriya* (senses) would be beyond his control.

This is what happened to the gopis. '*Nishamya geetam tadanangavardhanam vrajastriyah krishnagriheetamaanasaah.*' Shukadevji says, 'Rajan, Shri Krishna had stolen the hearts of the gopis right at the beginning.' The gopis' mana is not with them, nor is their intellect. What does '*krishnagriheetamaanasah*' mean?

It was as though they were waiting for this moment. The long minutes of anticipation were over when Shri Krishna's *aahvaahana* (invitation) came. '*Nishamya geetam tadanagavardhanam.*' The sound of the venu was such that it intensified their love for Shri Krishna. What did they do when they heard the sound of the flute? It was clear to every gopi that it was her name that was being played. Every gopi came running, but they were all careful about one thing. What was that? The gopis were careful that no other gopi should see her going to Shri Krishna. '*Aajagmuranyonyamalakshitodyamaah*'. They did not even want the gopis who had done sadhana along with them to know. Why was that? You see, every one of them had offered up her life to Shri Krishna. They were all *samarpita* to Him. All their relationships were with Him or through Him. They had no personal relationships with anyone.

This is an important factor in *samarpana* (surrendering one's self to Bhagwan). Many people come and say, 'Maharaj, my life is *samarpita* (offered up to Bhagwan).' What is the meaning of *samarpana*? Is *samarpana* a very common thing? If you have personal relationships with anyone, your *samarpana* to Bhagwan is not total. Your surrendering yourself to Him is total if you feel that you are related only to Bhagwan, and all other relationships are routed through Him. The gopis are blessed. They feel detached from even those gopis who had done the Katayani vrat with them, and spent so many years together.

How were the gopis going? They were going as fast as possible. '*Javalola kundalah*' – their kundala (dangling ear rings) swung from side to side as they ran. They went running to Shri Krishna. One indication is that Yoga Maya prevented the gopis from noticing each other. One commentator has written that their longing for Shri Krishna was so acute that it filled their conscious mind, so that the mind did not register what they saw with their eyes. If you concentrate fully on some task, you will not know what is happening around you. It is the same with the gopis. They sped on their way to Shri Krishna, with their ear rings swinging as they ran. Where did they go? They went to where Shri Krishna stood under the Tamal tree, on the sandy bank of the Jamuna.

‘*Aajagmuh*’ – it is written that they went. The Shrimad Bhagwat is written by Maharshi Vyas, who is an Avatar of Bhagwan. There is a great play of words in Sanskrit. ‘*Aajagmuh*’. Where did they arrive? They arrived at the goal of all humans; where we all try to reach. They came to the Natwar Nagar (the well-dressed hero) Raas Behari (who enjoys doing the Raas); to that Kanhaiya. How did they reach Him? It is written here that some gopi was milking her cow, when she heard the sound of Shri Krishna’s venu. The pot of milk slipped from her hand unnoticed. Have a glimpse of the realm of the gopis’ mind; you will obtain the rasa of prema. The pot of milk slipped from the gopi’s hand. She ran like a mad woman to the Jamuna’s sandy bank.

One gopi was cooking the evening meal. As soon as the sound of the flute reached her ears, she forgot about everything and got up, leaving the food on the fire. Her mana belonged to Shri Krishna, and it flew to Him as soon as she heard Him call her on His venu. The gopis ran towards the sound of the flute, unaware of where they were going.

One gopi had just finished bathing. She was half dressed when she heard the venu. She ran, clutching her clothes to her. This is also a road to madness, good people. It is the summit of bhakti. People are driven out of their minds when they are overcome with love for Bhagwan. From the viewpoint of the world, they become mentally unbalanced. From Bhagwan’s viewpoint, this is bhakti at its peak.

I may have told you about this before. I had once gone to Gita Vatika at Gorakhpur. It was some twelve or fourteen years ago. Pujya Shri Radha Baba lived there at that time. Respected Draupadiji was also there. I had gone for Pujya Radha Baba’s darshan, taking some fruit as an offering. I asked the people there if it would be possible for me to get some clarifications from Baba, regarding spiritual matters. ‘Baba’s mental condition is not stable,’ they said. ‘You will get his darshan, but the rest is in the hands of Ishwara.’

I went in and placed the fruits at Baba’s feet, and prostrated before him. My *choti* (long tuft of hair worn by a Brahmin) was rather long at that time. ‘Your choti is very thick!’ commented Baba. ‘You seem to be a Pundit.’

‘Yes, Baba, I am studying.’

‘What are you studying?’

‘I am studying *vyaakarana* (Sanskrit grammar), Baba.’

‘Vyakaran! That is something even asses like me have studied!’ These were his very words. Vyakaran is the foundation of Sanskrit. Nobody can interpret Sanskrit correctly unless he has studied vyakaran. I remember exactly what Baba said that day, ‘Even asses like me have studied vyakaran!’

‘Baba, I have started to read the Bhagwat,’ I told him.

‘That is a good thing.’ He approved of my reading the Bhagwat. People told me about how an old friend of Baba’s had come to meet him and was driven away by Baba. Baba’s mind was in a different world that day. He angrily chased his friend for a long distance. A little later, he recovered his presence of mind, and asked about that very man. ‘Why hasn’t he come since so many days?’

‘Baba, he had just come, but you drove him off. You did not recognize him. Who did you think it was, Baba?’

Baba's reply establishes this word – madness! 'What I saw was that Akrura had come to take my Kanhaiya away. I drove him out of Vrindavan.' This was Baba's mental condition. 'I have come after driving away Akrura, so he doesn't take away our Kanhaiya.'

The gopis' mental condition was like that, when they left all their worldly possessions and families. We may think that their love was like the love of ordinary humans, but the gopis were not even conscious of their own mind or bodies. '*Vyatyastavastraa*' is written here. Their clothes and jewelry were all askew. Their make-up was incomplete. They ran helter-skelter to Shri Krishna. When they reached Him, they bowed down to Him.

Tomorrow we will discuss the conversation they had with Shri Krishna. It is a very sweet episode and deserves a little time to describe properly.

(Discourse of the third day)

Let us take our mind back to that divine leela. Let us see, with the eyes of the heart, how Shri Krishna played His flute to invite the gopis He loved so dearly. When the gopis heard the sound of Shri Krishna's flute, they became incapable of continuing with their work. They reached an emotional stage that worldly people would describe as madness. The gopis who were not prevented from going to Bhagwan came running to Him.

As mentioned earlier, the gopis were of four kinds. Some were *sadhana-siddhaa*. They had done sadhana in this life, and had obtained Prabhu by His Grace. Prabhu had given them the varadan that their desire to have Him as their husband would be fulfilled. Shukadevji describes how some gopis were stopped from going to Shri Krishna. '*Antargrihagataah kaashchid gopyolabdhaviniragamaah, krishnam tadbhaavanaayuktaa dadyurmeelitalochanaah. Dussahapre`shthaviraha teevrataapadhutaasubhaah, dhyaanapraaptaachyutaashle`sha nirvrityaa ksheena mangalaah.*'

It is Prabhu's leela that if a person has a sincere desire for Him, there is no power that can keep them away from Him. Here, Prabhu showed the truth of this. Some gopis were stopped by their families. The families locked them in the house and sat on the door step to make sure they couldn't get away. '*Kaashchit*' means some gopis. Most of the gopis had gone, but there were a few who were prevented by force. When these gopis saw that there was no way by which they could go to Shri Krishna, '*Gopyolabdha viniragamaah*' – our Maharajji used to say that these words refer to birds. There was no opening through which even a bird could escape. How could the gopis get out?

Those who have prema for Prabhu never lose hope, since they never feel that they have obtained Prabhu through their own efforts. They always feel that they have obtained Prabhu through His Grace. Prabhu is all powerful. No power on earth can compare with His. When the gopis found themselves unable to go to Him on their own power, there was just one route open to them. '*Krishnaanatadabhaavanaa yuktaah*'. They sat inside their homes, shut their eyes, and began to meditate on Shri Krishna. They entered a Samadhi. This is an extraordinary episode.

People often complain about being unable to meditate. They ask me how meditation should be done. These gopis meditated even such adverse circumstances. You may ask, 'What adverse circumstances?' The thwarting of their life's goal! That Prabhu, to whom they had surrendered their lives, was calling them, but they couldn't go to Him! What greater sorrow or adverse situation could there be? Even under such circumstances the gopis sat down and began to meditate on Shri Krishna. They slipped effortlessly into a Samadhi. Their mind took on the form of Shri Krishna. A divine Vrindavan appeared in their mind. They looked for Shri Krishna in that divine internal Vrindavan, just as they used to look for Him in the external Vrindavan.

Not finding Shri Krishna even in the inner Vrindavan, they experienced the intense pain of *viyoga* (being separated from Him), because they could neither reach Him in the outer world, nor in the inner world. They had a darshan of Vrindavan, but they did not get a darshan of Bhagwan in their meditation.

'*Duhsah pre`shtha viraha*' – in Sanskrit, *pre`shtha* means the one who is the dearest; the Beloved. The gopis experienced such intense agony at being separated from that preshta, that the stray *sanskaara* (subtle subconscious impressions) of negative feelings that were left in them were all burnt in the fire of this pain. The gopis' lives were filled with positive sanskaras. Vedas were chanted at their homes. You will see that this is a wonderful way to attain Bhagwan. It is said that when we embark on the path to Bhagwan, all our faults and sins are forgiven, our *karma-bandhan* (the bonds of karma) are broken in the wonderful path of bhakti. When a bhakta experiences the intense pain of viyog he thrashes in the throes of anguish. He shouts in agony. Yes, when the pain becomes unbearable, a bhakta is forced to shout, and weep, sometimes. This is the acute suffering experienced by the gopis.

You see, this is a marvelous method of terminating all karma (voluntary actions), karma-bandhan, and karma sanskara. Their *ashubha* (inauspicious) sanskaras and karmas were all ended.

What did Prabhu do when the gopis' inauspicious karmas and sanskaras were destroyed? He is Natanagar (the beautifully dressed hero), Murlimanohar (who plays the flute and steals hearts). He smiled gently. His pitambara (yellow stole) fluttered in the breeze. This is how He manifested in the hearts of the gopis who were imprisoned at home by their families. As soon as Prabhu manifested in their mind's eye, they united with Him. The agony was inside their homes, their ecstasy was also inside their homes. Bhagwan not only manifested, He smiled and asked, 'Gopi, why are you so troubled?'

Shri Krishna was the gopis' *praana* (life spirit), He was their life. They suffered the sharp pangs of separation when they could not meet Him, and they experienced such exquisite bliss when they did, that they became incapable of speech. They were unable to speak in both situations.

Tears poured from the gopis' eyes when Bhagwan appeared and smiled at them. Bhagwan saw that they had become incapable of saying anything. He went close to them and embraced them. They experienced this in the realm of their emotions. It is written here, '*Dhyaanapraaptaachyutaashle`shaa.*' They obtained Bhagwan's *ashle`sha* (embrace) in their *dhyaana* (meditation).

Oh! The ecstasy of Bhagwan's touch! What an experience, to be embraced by Bhagwan! Even the people who have seen Bhagwan in their dream – and I am sure that there are some here who have – will know how the memory of that dream fills us with joy. What could be more wonderful than to actually meet Him? And if Prabhu Graces someone with an embrace, he is bound to be overcome with emotion every time he thinks of it. This is how a bhakta can be recognized – he will always be lost in the bliss of that memory.

Bhagwan embraced these gopis. The bliss they experienced was so intense that the fruit of all their *punya* (spiritual merit) was used up. The fruit of good deeds is happiness. The fruit of all the good deeds done by the gopis gathered and said, 'We do not have the capacity to give even a fraction of the happiness that Bhagwan's embrace gives.' What was the consequence of this? The intense suffering of viyog burnt up the gopis' inauspicious sanskaras, and the intense bliss of *sanyoga* (union with Bhagwan) used up their auspicious sanskaras. The bondage of (good and bad)

karmas ended. The gopis experienced being one with Bhagwan while they were in a state of meditation. This is an experience of Vedanta, through bhakti.

See how wonderful bhakti is! The eleventh canto of this very Shrimad Bhagwat is about Bhagwan's sermon to Uddhav. Before departing for His own land, Bhagwan explains the essence of Vedanta, Gnan, *vairaagya* (non-attachment) etc, and Uddhav's *avidyaa* (nescience; lack of Gnan) is removed. The same Shri Krishna told Arjuna the Gita. At the end of the eighteenth chapter, Arjuna told Shri Krishna that his ignorance had been destroyed – '*nashto mohah smritirlabdhvaa*'. Here, however, the same Shri Krishna explains Vedanta to the gopis. Shri Shukadevji Maharaj says, '*Tadunasmaranahdhvastajeevakoshasta.*' Two shlokas were enough to dispel the gopis' *avidya*! Their *jeevakosha* (the illusionary sheath of individuality) was shattered. They experienced oneness with Shri Krishna.

So then, who was the *uttama adhikaaree* (the most eligible candidate for Gnan) – Uddhav, Arjuna, or the gopis of Vraja? The answer is obvious. It is written in all these works. You will note that only a thin film of *avidya* hid the ultimate truth from the gopis. It was removed by Shri Krishna's sermon of the *shabda brahma* (revelation of the Brahman through speech). As per the tradition, they attained their pristine essence as soon as the *avidya* was removed.

The task was accomplished. Karma sanskaras were destroyed. This is made clear in the very next shloka. Shukadevji says, '*Tame`va paramaatmanam jaarabuddhyaapi sangataah, jahuragunamayam de`ham sanghah praksheenabandhanaah.*' The gopis' *gunamayam shareeram* (the body subject to the three gunas of Prakriti) was given up.

What is the *gunamaya sharira*? It is all three bodies – the *sthoola shareera* (gross physical form), *sookshma shareera* (the subtle body composed of the fourfold mind), and the *kaarana shareera* (causal body, created by actions in past lives). When the three gunas (tendencies) of Sattva, Rajas and Tamas are equally balanced, it is called Prakriti (Nature, Bhagwan's power of Creation). All three bodies in an individual are created by Prakriti, whether it is ignorance, the causal body, the subtle body of the dreaming state, or the gross body of our waking state.

'*Jahuragunamayam*' – the body that is the result of Prakriti. That means, all the false impressions we have due to ignorance, or the *avidyaa maayaa* (Bhagwan's power of illusion that makes us believe that this world is real) were eliminated. This was done very quickly.

How was this done very quickly? It was because of the gopis' intense anguish at being separated from Bhagwan, and by His embracing them. Both these were so extraordinary that it is natural to be surprised. Even Raja Parikshit was surprised, so our being surprised is quite understandable.

Why do we feel surprised? Because those who have some knowledge about Vedanta know that a person needs *saadhan chatushtaya* (the four steps to purifying the mind). He needs to study the Brahma Sutra, and the Upanishads, before he can qualify for enlightenment. It is better to become a gopi! Even after all these efforts for spiritual progress, people don't easily obtain the experience of oneness with Bhagwan.

Raja Parikshit asked a question that may occur to many of us. Shukadevji was engrossed in describing the sweetness of this episode. Who is describing this

episode? It is an *avadhoota* (a Monk with absolute renunciation) who does not even wear a loin-cloth! It is that avadhoot who is describing Prabhu's leelas; it is Shukadevji Maharaj! Eighty-eight thousand Rishis were listening to the *kathaa* (discourse). The place was the purifying area of Shukatatal. Parikshit was the principal listener.

'Prabhu, wait, please! I did not understand this point. How could the gopis' avidya be removed without their getting Brahmagnan (knowledge of the essence of the Brahman)? *Krishnam viduh param kaantam na tu brahmatayaa mune`.*'

The gopis has accepted Shri Krishna as the *parama pati* (supreme husband). They had not experienced Him as the Brahman. This world – or the three bodies – is the result of the three gunas of Prakriti; or of avidya. How did the gopis achieve the elimination of these?

If an insensitive person interrupts a talk of extreme sweetness to ask an intellectual question, the speaker is bound to feel irritated. Shukadevji was irritated by Parikshit's question. Shukadevji was beyond anger; he had a love for Parikshit, addressing him as 'son' – '*E`tatye` kathitam taata.*' That same Shukadevji gets irritated with Parikshit for interrupting the description of Bhagwan's divine leela. '*Uktam purastaade`tate` chaidyah siddhim yathaa gatah.*' Parikshit, I had explained this earlier, in the episodes of Shishupala and Hiranyakashipu. You are asking unnecessary questions.'

What does *uktam purastaada* indicate? Our Maharajji used to say that when somebody interrupts, these words are used to convey that the matter has already been clarified. Parikshit sat silent. He could not remember the explanation.

Shukadevji said, 'I have explained that anyone who gets attached to Bhagwan gets liberated, regardless of what his emotion is. Shishupala obtained Bhagwan by abusing Him, and Hiranyakashipu obtained Him through enmity. That being the case, Parikshit, couldn't the gopis obtain Him through love? What question is this? *Buddhim ape`kshate`* is the principle. The intellect is not needed here.

Fire burns, whether it is touched knowingly or unknowingly. Will fire say, 'The man did not know my power. Let me not burn him'? Everything has its own shakti (power). Poison will kill and *amrita* (the elixir that given immortality) will give immortality when they are consumed, whether the person has its knowledge or not. The affect of these do not depend on the *buddhi* (intellect).

Therefore, when anyone attaches himself to Bhagwan, he is liberated. Even those who hated Bhagwan obtained Him, and here the gopis love Him with all their hearts, Rajan!

Our Shri Maharajji used to say that preachers sometimes give a metaphysical explanation when speaking about the Maha Raas. They explain that Shri Krishna is the Brahman and the gopis are the *chitta vritti* (the inclinations of the mind). When all inclinations get attached to Bhagwan, it is called the Maha Raas.

Our Maharajji felt that there was enough Vedanta available to our Rishis – they didn't need to bring Vedanta in to this episode of supreme bhakti. 'Don't the Upanishads contain Vedanta? Isn't there Vedanta in the Brahma Sutra and the Bhagwat Gita? What need is there to bring Vedanta forcibly into the Maha Raas? This leela is filled with sweetness; why disturb the sweetness by imposing the chitta

vritti and Brahman? Why not simply savor the pure rasa of this episode? If our Thakur has given up His *rasa-svaroopā* (essence of rasa) to become *raasa-svaroopā* (the essence of Raas), is it because He is less intelligent than us? People unnecessarily bring in His rasa swarupa into His Raas swarupa!' This is how our Maharajji would speak. When he spoke on bhakti, it seemed as though it was some Vaishvana Acharya (Master of a Vaishnav cult) speaking.

Once, our Maharajji was doing a katha at Vrindavan. He was describing how Shri Krishna broke the pot of butter. Many people from different Vaishnav sects were present among the listeners. Maharajji had a great sense of humor. He would occasionally indulge in some gentle satire. 'Do you know why Kanhaiya broke the pot, in the Ukhal Bandhan Leela?' he asked. 'Why did He shatter the *ghata* (pot, symbolizing the body)? This is a sweet leela of Vrindavan! Kanhaiya thought, "If I don't shatter the *ghata* here, in the city of Vaishnavas, the Vedantis of Varanasi will start the *khat-pat* (arguments) on *ghata-pata* (the pot, symbolizing the body, and the picture, symbolizing the five elements of which the world is made) here.'" Bhagwan felt that by breaking the pot, the debate about the form and matter would be ended.' This was said to a large gathering of Vaishnav Mahatmas! Our Maharajji was unique!

Once, Maharajji did a Bhagwat at Mumbai's Cross Maidan. Revered Swami Gangeshwaranandji Maharaj was the Chief Guest at the inaugural function. In his inaugural speech, Swamiji said, 'The *vaktaa* (preacher) is Shukadevji Maharaj incarnate! There is no doubt about this!' Our Maharajji's personality, and his knowledge and grasp of our philosophy and scriptures were exceptional. Swami Gangeshwaranandji had understood the *poornataa* (wholeness) of his life. His very words about our Maharajji were that the preacher was Shukadevji incarnate!

Some people once came to our Maharajji at Vrindavan. 'Maharajji, who wrote the Shrimad Bhagwat?' they asked. There is some doubt about Maharshi Veda Vyas having written it. Some people believe that it was written by Pundit Bopadev, because the Sanskrit used in the Bhagwat is very difficult, whereas the Sanskrit in Vyasji's other works is very simple. Our Maharajji was an acknowledged authority on all these works, and so people wanted to know his opinion regarding this.

However, our Maharajji was not interested in such disputes. 'I wrote the Shrimad Bhagwat,' he said. 'Ask me for any clarifications you want.' This was his way of conveying that our focus should be on that what is really important. Maharajji's responses were amazing and enlightening.

So, Shukadevji told Parikshit, 'Rajan, I have already told you about this, and now you ask me how the gopis' avidya was removed without their getting Brahmagnan or knowing Vedanta? You wonder how they obtained Shri Krishna, and rose above the *trigunamayee maayaa* (the Maya that has three gunas)? This question is not proper here.'

Raja Parikshit was alert now. He listened eagerly. The gopis obtained Bhagwan, but their gross body – composed of the five elements – was still seated in a Samadhi at their home. Their family members sat outside the doors, guarding them. The gopis experienced Prabhu's embrace in their subtle body – the *chinmaya shareera*. The gopis who had been stopped from going to Shri Krishna reached Him first, long

before the gopis who came running at His call. How was that? The other gopis had to come on foot, but these gopis reached Him without moving.

Shukadevji said, 'Both reached Prabhu.' This establishes another thing. Bhagwan's body is *chinmaya* (pure consciousness). It is written that people doubt that Bhagwan disappeared before the Maha Raas. However, even the gross body of a bhakta who comes close to Bhagwan through sadhana, becomes chinmay. The gopis' bodies were made of the five elements, but they had been filled with Bhagwan's Saccidananda essence. This is the summit of sadhana.

There are two examples of this even in the Kali Yuga (the present age of Kali, when wickedness flourishes). One is Chaitanya Mahaprabhu. Where did his body go? It merged into the form of Jagannath Swamy in the temple at Puri. This is one example. The other example is Meera Bai, whose body merged into the form of Dwarikadheesh, in the temple at Dwarka. Had the bodies of these two bhaktas not been chinmay, they could not have merged into Bhagwan's forms. This is the principle of the ultimate in bhakti. When such bhakti is attained, this can happen even in the Kali Yuga, which is not the time for Bhagwan to take an Avatar. Therefore, it can certainly happen when He comes in an Avatar! Raas Behari Bhagwan was standing there, paying His venu. He had invited the gopis to do the Maha Raas. How could His form be made of the five elements like an ordinary human being's? Bhagwan's vigraha (form) is chinmay, and the gopis' forms were chinmay. The gopis, whose gross forms were seated in a Samadhi at home, came to Bhagwan in their divine subtle forms. All the gopis came to participate in the leela of the Maha raas.

Shukadevji was in such a joyful state that he was lost to the outer world. He did not know who was listening to him and how, or who was not listening. Had he been aware of all this, perhaps he would not have described the episode the way he did.

'Why did Bhagwan do all this?' asked Raja Parikshit.

Shukadevji stopped describing the scene at that point. He could not speak fully about the Maha Raas. If you read the Bhagwat, you will see that Shukadevji stopped describing this leela as soon as Parikshit asked this question.

'All the gopis came to the sandy bank of the Jamuna,' said Shukadevji. 'The Chandrama had risen, the night had deepened a little. Bhagwan Shri Krishna stood under a Tamal tree. His form shone like a blue sapphire and His yellow stole fluttered in the breeze. He held His venu in His hand. He was so attractive that it put Kamadev (the presiding deity of lust) to shame.'

Shridhar Swamy has written that Bhagwan did this leela to lure Kamadev to the battlefield and defeat him. '*Brahmaadajaisangharodha darpa sandarpah darpah jayatee shree patiragopee raasa mandala mandalaah.*'

Kamadev had developed pride. 'I defeated Brahmaji when he was overcome with lust for Saraswati. I overcame Shivaji when he was overcome with lust for Mohini. Only Narayana remains to be conquered.'

Bhagwan said, 'Look, Kamadev, I will play all your games openly. I will show you what *bhagavattaa* (being Bhagwan) is.' Therefore, breaking Kamadev's pride was another reason for doing the Maha Raas. The main purpose of the Maha Raas was to

accept the supreme prema of the gopis, and to experience their bliss, and the secondary purpose was to remove Kamadev's pride.

Shri Krishna's vigraha was so attractive that it put Kamadev to shame. Shyam Sunder stood there, with thousands of gopis crowding round Him. They gazed lovingly into each others' eyes. Every gopis felt that Bhagwan was looking at her. The gopis were too happy for words. They could not even say, 'You played the venu to call us!' The original text does not mention any conversation. The gopis' bodies tingled with joy. Shri Krishna welcomed them smilingly. '*Svaagatam vo mahaabhaagaah preeyam kim karavaani vah*. O most fortunate gopis, you are welcome!'

If the one to whom you have surrendered your life, the one you worship, calls you and speaks lovingly, what is left for you to desire? Is there anything more that anyone would want?

'*Svaagatam vo mahaabhaagaah*' – see how Bhagwan addressed the gopis. 'O gopis, who have great good fortune, I welcome you to My place.' What does *svaagata* (welcome) mean? It means I am happy that you have come; your coming is a cause of happiness for Me. Bhagwan spoke lovingly and smiled tenderly at the gopis. Then He asked something. '*Priyam kimkaravaani vah* – what can I do to please you? Tell Me what you want. I am prepared to do what you want today.' *Priyam* – what is dearest to you.

Prabhu's invitation, His darshan, and His joyful question! No gopi had the ability to tell Bhagwan what He should do! They were all floating in a sea of love and happiness. This happens sometimes. Bhagwan is asking, but the gopis are in no condition to reply. Their extreme happiness renders them incapable of registering Shri Krishna's question, or answering Him.

Prabhu wanted the gopis to say something. When He saw that they were in no state to say anything, He decided to provoke them. Bhagwan is Natwar; He is a bit crooked. He never even walks straight! He loves to tease. He changed the topic completely. Until now, He had welcomed the gopis and asked what He could do to please them. Now He says, '*Vrajasyaa naamayam kachchid* – I hope all is well at Vraja? How is it that you have all come here at this hour of the night?'

The gopis were shocked. They couldn't believe their ears. Bhagwan had played His venu to call them, and He had welcomed them. If someone invites you and welcomes you warmly, won't you believe that they are genuine? But if they invite you and then ask why you have come, will you think that they are decent people? '*Brootaagamanakaaranam aagamana kaaranama brootaa*'. I am not telling you something written by any commentator. This is given in the original text. It means, 'Tell Me why you have come.'

'Oh, You invited us! You just welcomed us! What happened all of a sudden?' thought the gopis.

This is Shri Krishna's crookedness, it is His of teasing the gopis. There are two sides to bhakti – *pyaasa* (thirst) and *tripti* (satisfaction). The joy of *sanyoga* (union) cannot be experienced if there is only *viyoga* (separation). Love will not continue if there is only sanyog, or only viyog. If there is only viyog, it will be disheartening, and if there is only sanyog, prema will reduce. That is why the people of Vraja say that

pyasa (symbolizing separation) and tripti (symbolizing union) should come turn by turn, to strengthen prema. *Anirvachaneeya pre`mah svaroopam pratikshanam vardhamaanam*. Prema increases when sanyog and viyog are experienced turn by turn.

The gopis felt tripti when they came. Now Shri Krishna is deliberately giving them pyasa, by making them anticipate viyog. He stands before them, but ensures that they experience the pain of separation by questioning their reason for coming. The gopis were taken aback. What were they to say? He had called them and now He asks why they came!

There is a vast difference between the gopis and the premis of today. Today's premis would have begun to quarrel with Prabhu. 'First You call us and then You ask us why we have come?' The surrender of the gopis is remarkable. Their lives have been offered up to Prabhu. It is His wish, whether He has prema for them or not. This is complete surrender. The gopis make no reply. When Prabhu saw that they were silent, He teased them further.

'I hope your family members are all right? There has been no theft or robbery at Vraja, has there? No fire either, I trust?' Bhagwan went on asking questions, but the gopis remained silent. This is another kind of tug of war. Bhagwan Shri Krishna wanted to provoke the gopis to say something, but the gopis were completely surrendered to Him and unable to blame Him. It was a tussle between bhakta and Bhagwan!

When even this tactic failed to provoke the gopis, Bhagwan began to answer His own questions. 'All right, I think you must have come here to appreciate the beauty of the Sharad Purnima. You are savoring the fragrance of the flowering creepers, the humming of bees, and the murmur of the Jamuna. It is good that you came, but now that you have seen this lovely scene, I think you should go back.'

Even at this the gopis remained silent, but they did not go back. Then Bhagwan began to talk about the Dharma of a wife. 'Gopis, has any member of your family understood anything about Dharma? Haven't they understood the meaning of '*bhartuh shushrooshanam streenaam paro dharmo hyamaayayaa*' – a woman's greatest Dharma is to serve her husband and look after the house. If a woman serves a *suyogya* (befitting) husband, her service will ensure that she gets Bhagwan. She has no need to do any separate sadhana. This is the statement of the Shastras. Have you heard this or not? You should not have come here alone to the forest at this hour. Go and serve your husbands.'

After asking the gopis if they had heard the statement of the Shastras regarding a woman's duty, Bhagwan narrated a story. 'There was a man who came home very tired. He went to sleep with his head on his wife's lap. Their one year old child started to crawl towards the fire, attracted by the flames. The woman was faced with a great *dharmasankata* (Dharmic dilemma). If she went to save her child, it would disturb her husband's sleep, and if she stayed where she was, her child would get burnt. What was she to do? Ultimately, she decided to follow her *pati-vrata* Dharma (the Dharma of a faithful wife). Seeing her faith in Dharma, Agni Devta (the presiding deity of fire) manifested. He picked up the child and put him on her lap.

“Devi, you are great!” This is the greatness of a woman who is devoted to her husband.’

The gopis heard the story, but vouchsafed no reply. ‘Gopis, I have said what I wanted to. In My opinion, you should go back to your homes.’

Mahatmas call this the ‘Prema Prakashan Leela’ – the leela that reveals the prema of the gopis. The Krishnaprema that was hidden in their hearts was revealed. What depth of love! Had Bhagwan not asked all these crooked questions, their love for Him would not have been revealed. Bhagwan wanted to make the gopis say something. When they remained silent, He told them to go back. He knew that they were not prepared to return, and would, perhaps, say something to plead with Him.

Who can stop what Bhagwan wants? *Kartum akartum anyathaa kartum* – Bhagwan does everything, He does nothing, and nothing is impossible for Him! The gopis have the capacity of self-restraint. They remained silent. Ultimately, Bhagwan told them that in His opinion they should return to their homes. The way Shukadevji describes the scene, it seems he was actually watching it. Bhagwan said nothing more, and the gopis also remained silent. Their anguish at the thought of being separated from Bhagwan became intense. Their bodies began to tremble. Their breath came hot and fast. Tears flowed from their eyes, but they couldn’t say a word.

Shukadevji is always on Bhagwan’s side. He had left his parents and given up the world to obtain Bhagwan. The surprising thing is that after hearing what Bhagwan told the gopis, Shukadevji takes the side of the gopis. ‘How very hard-hearted You are!’ he reproaches Bhagwan mentally. ‘The gopis had done sadhana for You when they were so young! They obtained You through Dharma, by worshipping Katyayani Devi. You blessed them, but they never asked You for anything. You played the venu and called them – and now You behave like this?!’ At times, Prabhu’s behavior shocks even His devoted bhaktas.

In the next shloka Shukadevji says, ‘*Pre`shtham priye`taramiva pratibhaashamaanam krishnam tadarthavineetarititasarvakaamaah.* Rajan, these are the very same gopis who had given up everything for Shri Krishna.’ What does this statement indicate? It means that even Shukadevji is speaking in favor of the gopis, not in favor of Shri Krishna. Why is that? Shukadevji is moved by the gopis’ pain, and their prema for Shri Krishna. What complete surrender theirs was! What tremendous prema! In spite of such behavior, they did not say a word; they just wept. How were the gopis weeping? The *kaajal* in their eyes mixed with their tears and flowed down to their feet. Their bodies had two black vertical lined from their eyes to their feet. Vishwanath Chakravarty of the Gaudiya Sect has written a commentary on the Bhagwat. He has imagined that the gopis were conveying a silent message to Shri Krishna. What message? In earlier times, carpenters would stretch a thread dipped in black paint to mark the line they wanted to saw, when cutting wood. Vishwanath Chakravarty has written that the gopis were telling Shri Krishna, ‘Shri Krishna, our bodies are in no condition to move away from You. If You don’t wish to accept us, we have already made the markings. Please use the saw and destroy our bodies.’

What I mean to say is that not only Shukadevji, but also other great bhaktas like Vishwanath Chakravarty, Jeev Goswami, Sanatan Goswami, and Roop Goswami take the side of the gopis. These Mahatmas had given up everything for Shri Krishna. 'Rajan,' said Shukadevji, 'This is the same Shri Krishna for whom the gopis had given up their all. They called Him 'Pre`shtha' – the one who is loved above all others.'

Shukadevji's renunciation is total. It is he who is giving a certificate to the gopis that all the desires in their lives have ended in their desire to obtain Shri Krishna. *Krishnamtadarthavinivartita sarvakaamah*. Their only desire was to obtain Shri Krishna.

The gopis were raking the earth with their toes. Tears flowed from their eyes. Their clothes were all askew. Shri Krishna wanted to hear them express their feelings. His behavior was utterly hard hearted. He showed no sympathy, but failed to provoke them into retaliating. Even Shukadevji was shaken by Bhagwan's behavior. So was Vishwanath Chakravarty. It is hardly surprising that the gopis were shaken.

For a long time, the gopis went on weeping and Bhagwan remained silent too. Then the gopis recovered their presence of mind and began to speak. And how did they speak? It is written here that an iota of *pranay kopa* (anger caused by love) was left in their heart – *sanrambhagadgadgirobruvataaanuraktaah*. In ordinary anger, there is an urge to hurt, but when the anger is a result of love, it never harms.

Why did the gopis have *pranay kopa*? It was not because of what Shri Krishna said. They knew that life would leave their body if Shri Krishna did not accept them. 'We have nobody else in this world! Why is Prabhu saying this?' wondered the gopis.

Later on there is a description in the Gopi Geet. The gopis say, 'If You wanted life to leave our body, there were many occasions when we would have died. Why are You inviting this slur on Your good name? You could have let us die at the time of the Kaliya daman, when You defeated the Kaliya Nag. All the people of Vraja would have drunk the poisoned water and died. Why did You lift up the Giriraj and save us, if it was death You wanted for us?'

The gopis were not angry at the thought of dying. They were quite prepared to die. 'This body is given by Him, and He can end it when He wants. However, His reputation will be spoilt for eternity if we die because of His not accepting us.' The gopis could not bear the thought of a slur on the name of their *aaraadhya* (object of worship). This was their *prema* for Shri Krishna. It is the summit of pure love that the only thought the gopis had, was about Shri Krishna's good, even after the way He behaved with them. They never gave a thought to the sacrifices they had made.

The gopis' lips were trembling; their eyes were reddened with weeping, but there was no dearth of self-control in their talk. Even in *pranay kopa* they spoke with extreme care. That is why this is called the 'Pranay Geet.' There are two songs in the episode of the Maha Raas. The Pranay Geet comes first, and the Gopi Geet comes later.

'Maivamvibhorahati bhavaana gaditum nrishanam santyajya sarvavishayaanstava paadamoolam, bhaktaa bhajasva dukhagrah maa tyasmaan de`voyathaadipurusho bhajate` mumukhoon – e`vam maam! Please don't say this!' The gopis' heart was

pierced by Shri Krishna's words. They begged Him to not tell them to go back. 'Maim e`vam maam. Don't say this to us.'

Why?

'It is not worthy of You, Shri Krishna. *Bhavaan e`vam drishmashama gaditam na arahati*. We can accept it if some selfish, wicked, worldly person were to speak like that, but You are our *aaraadhya* (object of worship). You are the Master of the world. Many bhaktas offer up their lives to You. It is not proper for You to talk like this. It does not behoove You.'

Why is that?

Nrishansa haa means 'so very hard'. 'Your hard-hearted talk will bring an end to our lives. You tell us to go back. We are not able to go back, Shri Krishna. Since You do not accept us, and we lack the capacity to go back, our lives will end here. It is not proper for You to behave like this.'

Why?

'You are Vibhu (all-pervading).' You may ask whether the gopis knew that Shri Krishna was Bhagwan. *Aishvarya* (the magnificence and power of the Ishwara) is revealed in *viyog*. *Maadhurya* (sweetness) is revealed in *sanyog*. You will see that Bhagwan's *bhagavattaa* (qualities of Bhagwan) is described in the Gopi Geet. The Pranay Geet also describes His divine attributes.

When a person experiences the pain of separation from Bhagwan, he obtains Gnan about the greatness of the one he worships. If you live with someone, you will not recognize their greatness very easily. It is only when you are separated from them that you understand their greatness. The gopis were experiencing *viyog* now (at the prospect of being separated from Bhagwan).

'You are Vibhu, Prabhu! You are present in all hearts. Nothing is hidden from You. You know what is in our heart. If You are doing this for the sake of society, You know that we are not concerned with society. We are concerned only with You. Why are You saying this?'

When a *saadhaka* (spiritual seeker) gives up everything and comes to his Sadguru (true Guru), the Guru embraces him and accepts him wholeheartedly. He gives his disciple the experience of Brahman through a verbal sermon. We have come in the same way, leaving everything behind.'

Please note that now we have been given two proofs about the gopis' prema and total surrender. Shukadevji said, '*Krishnam tadarthavinivartitasarvakaamaah*', and the gopis accept '*Santyaajya sarvavisyaanstava paadamoolam*. Kanhaiya, we have come to seek refuge at Your feet, having given up every worldly consideration.'

Can any bhakta put his hand on his heart and say that he has no worldly desires at all? The gopis can say this, and Shukadevji endorses it. 'We have given up everything, to come to You, Shri Krishna. You should not tell us to go back.'

Regarding the story You told us, we are *dharmanishtha* (adhering to Dharma).'

How are you dharmanishtha?

It must be remembered, good people, that Bhagwan played the *venu* in the episode of the *Venu Geet* as well as for the *Maha Raas*. The flute was played during the day for the *Venu Geet*, and at dusk for the *Maha Raas*. Had the gopis not been *dharmanishtha*, they would have run to Shri Krishna when they heard the *venu* the

first time. It is much easier to go into the forest in the daytime. However, the gopis did the ritual worship of Katyayani Devi instead. They obtained the *varadaana* (boon) that Shri Krishna would be their husband. Only after that did they go to Bhagwan when they heard the venu.

‘Shri Krishna, Your telling us about dharmanishtha is absolutely proper. Nobody can have *parama pre`ma* for You unless they have dharmanishtha. You told us a story about a woman who served her husband. Shri Krishna, we are not a *kathaakaara* (preacher) in this life, but we must have been one in some past birth, because we also know some stories. We want to answer Your story with another story, Shri Krishna. The husband of a sati sadhvi had gone to another country. Travel was difficult in olden times. The husband came back after two years. During his absence the sati sadhvi used to do ritual worship of her husband’s picture. She would think lovingly about Prabhu and her husband. She refused to attend any functions in the village while her husband was away.

After two years, her husband came home one day. She was garlanding his picture when he knocked at the door, calling out to her to open the door.

Tell us, Shri Krishna, what was her duty? Should she open the door after completing her puja, or should she leave the puja of his picture and open the door and welcome him?’

‘What is there to ask? When her husband has come home to her, she should leave the puja of his picture. She should open the door and welcome him, of course,’ said Shri Krishna. ‘The fruit of her worship was his coming back to her.’

The gopis began to smile at Shri Krishna’s answer. This is exactly what they wanted to hear. ‘To obtain You was the fruit of our serving our husbands,’ they said. ‘Now, that we have obtained You, what Dharma is left for us to do?’

The gopis asked many more questions. The time is up for today. We will talk more about it tomorrow.

(Discourse of the fourth day)

Let us return to the gopis who have been accepted by Devarshi Narad as the Acharyas (Teachers) of prema. In his 'Bhakti Sutra', Devarshi Narad has written, '*Yathaa vraja gopikaanaam.*' The gopis of Vraja are the essence of prema for Shri Krishna. They are sitting on the sandy bank of the Yamuna. They appeal to Shri Krishna, saying things prompted by anguish caused by their love for Him. Deep love underlies their words, but their talk sounds a little sarcastic and bitter. They tell Prabhu, 'You told us that the highest duty is to serve our husbands and families. However, what is the result – the fruit – of this? The fruit of doing one's duty is obtaining You! Now that we have obtained You, where is the rule that says we must go back to the interactive world?'

Our Guru, Swami Akhandanand Saraswati was told by Pujya Udiyababaji, to take Sanyas from Shri Brahmanand Saraswati, the Shankaracharya of Jyotish Peeth. After giving the *danda* (monk's staff, symbolizing the highest level of Sanyas) Shankaracharyaji Maharaj wanted our Maharajji to be Shankaracharya after him. When Maharajji came to know about this, he bowed down to his danda, and put it into the Gangaji, because nobody can become a Shankaracharya unless he has a danda. Maharajji felt that if he did not have his danda, nobody could make him the Shankaracharya.

An incident took place after this. Shri Karpatriji Maharaj, who was considered to be an authority on Dharma, urged Maharajji to accept a danda again. 'Accept the position of Shankaracharya,' he said. 'It will be beneficial for society.'

Maharajji smiled. 'Where have you seen the ruling of accepting a danda once it is given up?' he asked. 'If you show me where this is given in our Shastras, I will do so.'

The purpose of all our worldly duties – serving the family, serving the husband, doing Dharmik rituals, etc – is to obtain the Paramatma. Where does it say that we should return to the worldly duties after obtaining Prabhu?

This is exactly what the gopis are saying. Bhagwan Shri Krishna wanted this point to be spoken by the gopis. Jeev Goswami has called this episode, '*Pre`ma prakaashana leela*' – the leela that reveals prema. Bhagwan Shri Krishna wanted the world to know the purity of the gopis' heart, and the divine feelings they had for Him. These are revealed one by one. Bhagwan Shri Krishna stands silent, smiling gently, and the gopis go on speaking. Later, the gopis say, '*Kurvanti hi tvayi ratim kushalaaha sva aatman nityapriye` patisutaadibhiraartidaih kim. Tannah praseeda parame`shvara.*'

There is an apprehension of *viyoga* here, so the *aishvarya* is being shown. 'O Shyam Sunder! We have heard that You are the essence of the Ishwara. You are the Parameshwara incarnate. Be pleased!'

Why?

'What have all the people, who are considered by the world to be great, done to merit this praise? *Kurvanti hi tavayee ratim ye` tvayee ratim kurvanti te` kushalaah* – only those who have loved You have been called intelligent. How can we be called foolish, since we have prema for You? This is a common principle. Whoever had great prema for You – the great bhaktas and Acharyas – had prema only for You.

Only they are called 'kushala' (clever, skillful). What does this indicate? It indicates that those who do not have prema for You may be very intelligent, but from Your viewpoint, they will be considered foolish.'

If we get a human form and have love for Bhagwan, we are intelligent; but what is we don't have love for Him? I leave it to you to understand!

Many people love this interactive world. Love for the world will only give sorrow. Whether the one you love is good or bad, the result will be sorrow. Yes! If your friend is a good person, his sorrow will make you sad. If he is a bad person, he will bring you sorrow. Sorrow is inevitable in this world. But the path to Bhagwan is quite different. That is why a wise man does not get attached to worldly things even though he lives in the world. The Saints and Mahatmas live in this world without connecting themselves to Bhagwan through worldly relationships. They live in the world, connecting the world to Bhagwan. This is the difference between the Mahatmas and worldly people.

A worldly person can, perhaps, get attached to Bhagwan through his worldly relationships; whereas a bhakta remains attached to Bhagwan while living in this world. He lives to carry out Bhagwan's commands. Jambavan asked Hanumanji, 'What s the purpose of your life? You have been born to do Bhagwan's work. *Raama kaaja lagee tava avataaraa.*' So, the purpose of our life is to obey the Lord.

It is important to observe who we work for. Are we working for the sake of working? Do we work for a particular individual, or some specific purpose? The gopis say, 'Shri Krishna, only those who live for You and have love for You are noble and intelligent. And, this is exactly what we have done. If we have done this, Shyam Sunder, please Grace us by fulfilling our *abhilaashaa* (intense desire). You have warmed the creeper of our desire.'

Yes! The gopis say, '*Aashaam britaam tvayi chiraadaravinda ne`tra* – You have watered this creeper over a long period of time. You sowed its seed, and helped it to sprout. It will not be proper if You destroy this creeper now.'

Why? When was the seed sown?

'When You stole butter.'

Some Acharyas believe that the seed – called '*poorva raaga*' (an attachment from the past) – was sown at the time of Venu Geet, when Shri Krishna first played His flute. Other Acharyas say that when He stole butter, the gopis' dormant Gnan was awoken. The gopis did not steal butter – it was Shri Krishna who stole butter. He stole it in the homes of the gopis. And, did He really go to their homes for butter? Didn't He have enough butter in His own home? Would He have gone hungry at His own home? Not at all! He used the excuse of butter to steal the gopis' hearts!

Then, who sowed the seeds of love for Shri Krishna in the gopis' hearts? Shri Krishna did! This is what the gopis are saying. 'It was You who sowed the seed, by doing the leela of stealing butter. Then You did many other leelas. You made the creeper flower into an intense desire for You. It was You who made our love grow.

Now, we are like a robust creeper, eager to meet You. In such a situation, no sensible person would cut down a flowering creeper that he, himself, has nurtured. O Prabhu! Please accept this creeper of love; don't cut it down. It is You who nurtured it. It is You who planted it.'

Then they said, '*Chittam sukhe`na bhavataapa hritam grihe`shu* – we never even noticed when You captivated our *chitta* (mental inclination).' *Chittam sukhe`na*. 'Sukhena' means 'very easily'.

How can anybody capture anybody's *chitta*?

'You have not one, but many talents! Yes, indeed! You have a number of guiles for capturing our attention. You have many methods.'

Our Maharajji would tell us these things. Once, a new bride came to Vraja. Her mother-in-law told her, 'Daughter, the son of Nanda lives here. Every day he goes with the other gwaal baal to graze the cows. He is a great actor. If you glance at him even once, you will become useless for me. You will be unable to do any housework after that. Be careful about not looking at him.'

Only special people can enter Vrindavan. Bhagwan was aware of everything. He deliberately passed by the bride's door, playing His flute, when He went to graze the cows with the others. The gopi understood that this was the same son of Nanda who her mother-in-law had warned her about, so she turned her back towards the door, making sure that she did not see Him.

Bhagwan Shri Krishna stood there playing His flute, but the gopi didn't turn towards Him. When the sound of the flute failed to achieve what He wanted, He began to dance. The bells on Shri Krishna's anklets tinkled as He danced; *taa taa thai!* The gopi was longing to look at Him, but she remembered her mother-in-law's words. She was afraid that she would become useless.

Our Maharajji said that Kanhaiya thought, 'This gopi is influenced by some strong Guru. She has been tutored so well that she refuses to look at Me.' He picked up a tiny pebble and threw it at her teasingly. When she felt the pebble, she turned round even though she had decided not to, and her whole life turned towards Shri Krishna. She went and began to dance with Him. She became His forever.

What is the purpose of telling you this? The gopis say, 'We have not given You our *chitta*.' See the lovely word used here – '*apahritam*'. *Apahritam* means, 'You have abducted our *chitta*.' You know what *apaharan* means, don't you? It means, to kidnap. The gopis said, 'Maharaj, You have carried away our *chitta* by force.'

How?

'Oh, You have many ways to do this!'

Our Maharajji used to say that there is one more point to note in this. We generally say, '*Mana nahin lagataa* – my mind is not settled; it is restless.' We pray, 'Prabho, please sit in my heart. Please manifest in my heart. Please give me Your darshan once.' It doesn't happen. The gopis' mind, however, is so beautiful that Bhagwan steals it without the gopis' making any effort. *Apahrita!* 'Did we give our love to You? There is no question of giving; we didn't even know when You stole it!'

Yes! The hearts of the gopis are so pure, so limpid, that Bhagwan sees them and gets tempted. It is only when someone gets tempted that he steals. He steals because he can't obtain it by proper means, and he can't do without what he wants. The words used here: *Chittam sukhe`na bhavataapa hritamgrihe`shu* - 'You have abducted our *chitta* so skillfully, Kanhaiya, that we didn't even know when it was stolen. That is why we are in this condition now. And now, You tell us to return to our homes? *Paadau padam na chalatastava paadamoolaad.*'

I ask you to just look at the hearts of the gopis once! I am quoting the original shlokas. The gopis' lives are immersed so deeply in Shri Krishna, that love for Him is the center of their existence. The things said here are such that if even a little bhakti for Shri Krishna is present in your life, the memory of these words will fill your heart. What a life theirs was!

The gopis say, 'Kanhaiya, we have surrendered this life to You, and You are telling us to return to our homes and families. We ought to obey You, because our lives belong to You. We should stay if You tell us to stay, and we should go if You tell us to go. However, Kanhaiya, we face a dilemma; what are we to do?'

'What is your dilemma, gopis?'

'When You told us to return, we tried to go towards Vrindavan, but we found that our feet don't have the strength to go. We are unable to lift up our feet and walk away from You.'

The words used by the gopis are, '*Paadao padam na chalatastava paadamoolaad*. The strength in our feet vanishes as soon as we get ready to leave Your feet. We become incapable. What are we to do? It is our Dharma to obey You, but we can't!'

See the condition of the gopis. One commentator has written that we should imagine that Kanhaiya told the gopis, 'All right, if your feet are unable to walk, I will arrange transport. Should I send for a cart or something else, for you to go to Vrindavan?'

Then the gopis gave their next point. '*Paadau padam na chalatastava paadamoolaad yaamah kathamvrajamatho karavaama kim vaa*. You may arrange our transport, but what will happen when we reach? The condition we are in at present is such that as soon as we leave You, all strength will leave our body. When we get to Vrindavan our hands will not be able to do any work. Our body will not be able to get up. Our condition is so strange, Shyam Sunder; what are we to do? We don't know what to do.'

Another point mentioned by our Maharajji regarding this episode is to compare it to the earlier episode of the Yagya patnis. Those ladies were the wives of the Chowbey Brahmins of Mathura. The Chowbeys were doing a Yagya. The gwaal baal went to them to get *bhikshaa* (begged food) for Krishna and Balaram, but the Chowbeys sent them back. The boys then went to the wives of the Brahmins – the Yagya patnis. The wives came at once, bringing all kinds of food in plenty. Their husbands, sons and brothers tried to stop them, but they refused to listen. They came straight to Krishna and Balaram and fed them lovingly.

After Shri Krishna and Balaram finished eating, the shlokas given are almost identical to the shlokas of the Raas leela. Even there, Shri Krishna had greeted the Yagya patnis by saying, '*Svaagatam vo mahaa bhaagaa*. Welcome! Please come.' They asked the ladies to be seated, and ate the food they'd brought. At that time Shri Krishna had told them, 'The Yagya of the next timing will be done soon. Your husbands are waiting for you, because the wife has to do the Yagya along with her husband. You should now go back.'

The Yagya patnis said, '*Maivam vibhorhatibhavaan gaaditum nrishansam*.' This is the first sentence, and it is almost identical, except for a small difference. There He said, '*Santayajya sarvavishayaanstava paadamoolam*'. Kanhaiya was listening. The Yagya patnis said, 'You have said, in the Shastras, that when a person renounces

everything and comes to You, he does not have to return to the world. Please let Your words be proved to be true.’ This is what the Yagya patnis say. That means, they wish to stay back with Shri Krishna, and use Shri Krishna’s words to justify staying back. ‘It is Your statement that he who renounces everything doesn’t have to go back into the world. We have given up everything and come to You. We have left our home and family, to surrender at Your feet, so please let Your statement be true.’ Bhagwan thought, ‘They have silenced Me on the intellectual level.’ It is Bhagwan’s statement that a person who renounces everything and goes to Him does not have to return to the world. After all, they were the wives of learned Brahmins – that too, Vedic Brahmins! Maharaj, anyone who lives with a pundit becomes half a pundit. Thus, the wives of the Vedic Brahmins silenced Prabhu. However, Bhagwan is Bhagwan, after all! He remained silent, knowing they would say something more. Their surrender was not yet total. A person who surrenders completely does not place the person in a helpless position. This is how total surrender is recognized. The Yagya patnis are saying, ‘This is Your statement. You should make it come true. You should not tell us to go.’ Their talk showed their desire to stay.

Bhagwan understood that their desire was not total. He remained silent. The next sentence came from the lips of the Yagya patnis. ‘*Grihnantee no na patayahpitarau sutaa vaa*. Shri Krishna, even if we listen to You and go back, we will not be accepted by our husbands, sons and brothers.’ This is the difference in the replies given by the Yagya patnis and the gopis. The gopis say, ‘We want to go, because that is what You have told us to do, and it is our Dharma to obey You; but these feet of ours are unable to move. Our hands are unable to do any work.’ And, the Yagya patnis say, ‘Even if we return, our men folk will refuse to accept us.’ What does this indicate? It indicates that they are prepared to return even now, provided they are accepted by their families.

It often happens that a person leaves his home in a moment of heat. ‘I will live in Vrindavan henceforth. I will only do Kanhaiya’s bhajan and Banke Bihar’s darshan.’ A man gets a surge of bhakti, or he quarrels with his wife or son, and decides to live in Vrindavan. Within a couple of months he experiences all the practical problems of living in Vrindavan. Then, when his wife or son comes to persuade him to return home, he is not averse to returning. The impulse that had prompted him to leave his home is gone. He allows himself to be persuaded to return. Now, tell me the truth – will he be in favor of Banke Bihari or will he return to his home? What will he do? Yes! He will go back, because he had left his home due to a problem; not because of love for Banke Bihari. This is the difference.

The Yagya patnis went to Shri Krishna with love, but now they fear that they will be rejected if they return to their homes. They fear that they will have nowhere to go.

‘I will arrange everything,’ said Kanhaiya. ‘Don’t worry about being rejected. Leave alone just being accepted – your husbands will welcome you by doing your *aarati* (worship with a lamp).’ This is what He did. Prabhu has the capacity to do everything. When the Yagya patnis reached home, their husbands welcomed them with great respect. ‘You are *dhanya* (fortunate). In spite of being such great Vedic pundits, we could not get Kanhaiya’s darshan. You, however, obtained His darshan

even though you never studied the Vedas or did Yagyas,' they said. 'We are fortunate to have wives like you.'

So, what does that mean? If you compare the wives of the Brahmins with the gopis, the former are educated, but the gopis are illiterate. The episode of the Yagya patnis comes just before the episode of the Raas. The gopis' prema and their total surrender are divine. Yes! I will say only this – if we listen to this description with feeling, or think about it, our chitta will become pure.

The gopis are saying, 'We are not able to go. Our condition is such that we can't go.' Bhagwan remains silent. This is *pranaya geeta* (the song of love). Bhagwan wanted the reverence, love and devotion hidden in their hearts to come out, so He remained silent. The gopis said one more thing. 'You are silent. We are telling You that we are unable to go, and still You say nothing. You say nothing about our staying here either. We cannot do anything that is displeasing for You, because our life belongs to You. We have given ourselves to You completely. But, what will be the result? We feel a divine apprehension, Shyam Sunder, about what will happen. *No che`d vayam virahajaagnyupayuktade`haa.*

If You refuse to accept us now, this body will not reach home. And if You accept us (and send us away), the fire of viraha will burn this body. The *agni* of viraha will flare up, Kanhaiya, and do You know what will happen? Our body will be burnt to ashes by this fire. And, when this body turns into ashes, there will be two consequences. One is that a slur will be cast on Your Krishna prema, Your Krishna bhakti. Yes! People will say that it is no use loving Kanhaiya, because even the gopis, who loved Him so much, had to sit at His feet and give up their bodies. This is what everybody will say. This is one fear we have.'

The other fear of the gopis is quite extraordinary. They say, 'We are not learned, Kanhaiya – *dhyaane`na yaama padayoh padaveem sakhe` te`.*' These are the words in the original text. 'We are illiterate, but we have heard.....'

What have you heard, gopis?

'We have heard that when a person dies, he becomes whatever his last thought is.' See where the gopis' mind has gone. 'Our body will be destroyed in the fire of viraha. It will end while we think about Shri Krishna, so in our next birth, we will become Shri Krishna.'

Then, what is the problem?

The gopis are so simple hearted and straight forward! 'Do You know, Kanhaiya; You are denying us just now, but we know how much You love us. You will not be able to bear it if our body is burnt and destroyed. We will remember You as we leave this body, and You will think of us while leaving Your body. We feel afraid that in our next life we will become so many Krishnas and You will become a gopi. That will create a problem.'

This is what Jeev Goswami has written. 'Because, if You think of the gopis (while leaving Your body) there will be only one gopi left. The rest of us, thousand of gopis, will all become Kanhaiya.' Yes! This is the ultimate simple heartedness, and it emerged unwittingly. The gopis do not expect anything. '*Dhyaane`na yaama padayoh padaveem sakhe` te`* - O Shyam Sunder, when we meditate on You as we leave our body, we will attain Your essence; and when You leave Your body, You

will get our body. That will cause great confusion. So, at the bottom of every appeal, what we want to say is: please accept us. Don't tell us to go. Don't send us away.'

The gopis say such amazing things! They say, 'If You say that we have been foolish, well, we have already told You that all intelligent people have prema for You. And, if You disregard what intelligent people say, then, Shri Krishna, Laxmiji left everything else and accepted You, didn't she?'

This is the argument the gopis brought up. How well they remember all past episodes, even though they are not learned! Jeev Goswami says that this makes us wonder whether it is actually Shri Krishna – seated in their hearts – who is speaking. How do the gopis remember all these incidents? They never went to school, nor did they go to any pundit or listen to discourses. They are very young. They are saying, 'Even Laxmiji gave up everything and chose You when she rose up from the *samudramanathan* (churning of the ocean). All the great people were present, including Brahma, Shankar and Indra. Laxmiji did not select any of them. We concede that we may be foolish, but Laxmiji would never have chosen anyone but You; she is not an ordinary woman! Since she chose You, we have considered the matter from all angles and seen that our choice is absolutely correct. We are going in the right direction. Laxmiji has chosen You, so, Shyam Sunder, be pleased. Grace us!' *Tannah praseeda* means, be pleased with us.

Kanhaiya, however, is so full of leela! Can you ever imagine Him being displeased with the gopis? The gopis pray to Him to be pleased with them. He is such an actor that they get the impression that He is not happy with them.

In Mathura, Shri Krishna would weep because He missed the gopis He had left behind at Vrindavan. When He was in Dwarka, surrounded by His sixteen thousand one hundred and eight queens, He would think about the gopis and tears would come into His eyes. Can you believe that He did not love them? Could Krishna ever leave the gopis? But, how wonderful is Natvar Nagar's leela! How well He pretends! His acting is so good that the gopis start thinking, 'Shri Krishna is not pleased with us. Had He been pleased with us, He would never have told us to go back.' This is the measure they apply. What they say is quite true; He would not have sent them away if He was pleased with them.

The truth if the matter is that He doesn't really want to send them away. He used this method to expose the depth of their love. He wants to savor their prema. It gives Him joy to see such prema.

You know of the episode in the Ramcharita Manas, when Sutikshnaji starts dancing with joy when he hears that Prabhu is coming. He remembered just one thing – *daasa bana karunaanudhaana kee so priya jaake` gati na aana kee*. He sees many qualities, but none in himself. Sutikshnaji remembered Prabhu's nature, that He loves whoever surrenders to Him, and meets that person. The thought of this made Sutikshnaji dance with joy. He was so overcome with love and joy, that Bhagwan told Laxman and Janakiji to bide awhile. He hid behind a tree to watch Sutikshnaji dance in ecstasy.

Yes! Love was revealed. It flowed forth in ripples and waves. Goswamiji wrote, '*Prabhu de`khe`n taru ota lukaayee.*' Prabhu hides behind a tree and watches with delight, as Sutikshnaji dances in joyful anticipation of His advent.

Oh, He, whose essence is Sacchidananda, has an intense desire for anand! The anand He seeks is that of seeing His bhaktas' love being revealed.

Why is that?

It is because the anand of His essence is the *shaantaananda* (the bliss of tranquility), while the anand of seeing His bhaktas' prema is a pulsating anand.

Krishna is the essence of prema and anand, but He wanted all the different feelings that are hidden in the gopis' hearts to be revealed. There were many kinds of ripples in the sea of the heart of the gopis. Shri Krishna wanted to have the anand of these being revealed to the world. The gopis pray, '*Tannah praseeda vrijinaar dana*. Oh, when any bhaktas calls out to You, Shyam Sunder, You remove all their problems. Our relationship with You is of long standing. You have given us a *varadaana* granting the fulfillment of our desire. You are the one who removes all problems and dangers. Be pleased. Accept us!'

The concluding point of every shloka is, 'Please accept us. Be pleased.' Bhagwan is silent even now. Please see Him, with love-filled eyes, and you will see how His body tingles with love and how He smiles slightly. Thousands of gopis are appealing to Him, and He is immersed in a sea of bliss, as He listens to their loving words.

'All right,' say the gopis. 'Let us forget Laxmi. However, Shyam Sunder, show us just one woman in the whole of Triloki who did not become Yours the moment she saw You. Show us just one!' They stated this clearly. 'Yes! Your swinging gait, Your sweet face, the sound of Your flute, and Your radiant smile are captivating. You wear ear rings that dangle, and You are beautiful to look at. Which lady has ever been able to withstand the sound of Your voice? Show us just one such lady! You won't find even one, in all the three worlds. All the ladies have become Yours. Then, what is surprising about our becoming Yours, too? We all belong to You, now.

It is Your special charm that Surpanakha and Kubja were captivated by You. Apart from them, even the water animals are captivated by You. If that be so, it is a special quality in them, or is it because of the special quality in You? When even creatures who live in water are captivated by You, what is surprising about human beings being captivated? Which is the woman who has seen Your *tribhanga lalita* (attractive figure, bent at three places) – that is the color of sapphires – and not become Yours? So, Grace us, because we, too, have become Yours, Shyam Sunder. Please accept us. Don't tell us to go away.

We have heard from Gargacharya that You have taken this Avatar to protect Vraja.' Just see the number of points the gopis remember! 'Kanhaiya! Gargacharya told us that this Avatar of Yours is for the purpose of protecting Vraja. If protecting Vraja is the purpose of this Avatar, then, Kanhaiya, we are in Vraja, too; and if our body is destroyed, it will raise a question mark about Your protection, won't it? So, please protect our life spirit. Let our life spirit not leave our body due to being separated from You. Place Your hand, which is as cool and lovely as a lotus flower, on our head, and accept us.'

Pleading thus, the gopis caught Bhagwan's feet. Tears poured from their eyes. They were badly shaken by the fear that Kanhaiya would send them back. Shukadevji Maharaj says that the gopis concluded their appeal, and Kanhaiya continued to look at them with a slight smile on His face. '*Iti viklavitam taasaam shrutvaa*

yoge`shvare`shvarah`. Shri Krishna is the Yogeshwara. The Sanakadis are the Yogis. Bhagwan Shankar is the Yogesh (the Ishwara of the Yogis) and Shri Krishna is the Ishwara of the Yogeshwara. Bhagwan Shyam Sunder can do what even Bhagwan Shankar can't do. This is why *eeshvara* is given twice here – *yoge`shvare`shvarah`*.

Bhagwan Shiva turned *kaama* (desire) to ashes, but *krodha* (anger) came to him. He had a spurt of anger. In the Raas Leela, however, kama stays far away, and krodha never comes. Bhagwan Shri Krishna smiles a challenge to Kamadev (the Devta of desire) as He does the leela of the Maha Raas. This is why Shukadevji calls Him 'Yogeshwara'.

Why is He smiling? '*Prahasya sadayam`*. Sadayam means, with compassion. Whenever Bhagwan meets anyone, it is because of His *kripaa* (Grace). He vanishes if someone thinks, 'I obtained Bhagwan by my sadhana; by my own intense efforts.' A person does sadhana, and is told that Prabhu cannot be obtained by sadhana. The person will ask, 'Then why should I do sadhana?' Sadhana is done to experience Prabhu's Grace. It is not enough to be told that Bhagwan is obtained by Grace alone; the Grace must be felt. It is only when a person tries his utmost, but fails to obtain Bhagwan, that he realizes that Prabhu's can be obtained only by His own Grace. Else, all this talk will mean nothing. He will be convinced only when he has done sadhana and realized this for himself.

So, with Grace – *sadayam aatmaaraamodapyareeram`*. What Grace did Bhagwan bestow? Bhagwan – who is *aatmaaraama* (fulfilled within Himself) is always fully content. He is happy in Himself. That is why Shukadevji says repeatedly that Bhagwan needs no external factor for His delight. He does all this to give joy to the gopis, to fulfill their desire. Jeev Goswami Maharaj has written, 'When He came in a *saguna* (with attributes) *saakaara* (with form) Avatar – to savor the flavor of the gopis' prema – He gave His *anumati* (consent) to the gopis.' What does it mean, that He gave His anumati?

Bhagwan said, 'Very well; you needn't return. As per the pleas made by you, there is no need for you to go back to your homes. Come; we will begin the *varadaana* that I had given to you. *Taabhih same`taabhirudaarache`shtitah priye`kshanotfullamviraveebhirachyutah`*. These are the original words. There are thousands of gopis there.

Our Maharajji gave one more meaning. He asked, 'Why did Thakurji do these leelas? The gopis had to weep for such a long time; they had to plead again and again. If Bhagwan wanted their prema to be revealed, it was already obvious!' *Aatmaaraama* also means *aatmarati* (being delighted with one's own Atma), but Maharajji gave yet another meaning. '*Aatmaa kuraadhikaa tasya – tasya shree krishnasya aatmaa raadhiikaa`* – who is this Atma?

Shri Krishna's Atma is Shri Kishoriji, Shri Radha Rani. Radha Rani and Shri Krishna always exist as Shakti (power) and *shaktimaana* (the one with power). They exist eternally as Prakriti (Nature) and Purusha (the Atma). They have no need for any other, and therefore, Shri Krishna is called 'atmaram'.

However, what happened in this leela? The flute was played. Kishoriji came, and so did thousands of gopis. Kishoriji saw the other gopis coming, and thought, 'At times

I show displeasure, and Kanhaiya cajoles me back into a good humor. Now, so many gopis are coming. They will be jealous of each other. Some of them may show displeasure to Kanhaiya. How will He cajole so many of them?’

Kishoriji quietly hid in a bower to see what Kanhaiya would do. Do you know what Bhagwan did? Had He welcomed them lovingly, it is possible that some jealousy would have arisen and they would begin to bicker. By saying no to all of them, Shri Krishna removed all scope for jealousy. The gopis were united in their fear of viyog, because Bhagwan was sending them all back. Any pride they had, vanished. The gopis all felt the same anguish. They went on weeping and pleading for a long time. All feelings of jealousy and pride disappeared.

All the gopis were of the same mind. Shri Krishna gave His consent after they wept and pleaded for a long time. By then, there was no jealousy or pride left. This was also a leela Prabhu did. So, good people, Kishoriji got a glimpse, today, of *kartum akartum anyathaakartum samartha*. Bhagwan can do anything and everything. What an excellent method He found, to ensure a complete absence of resentment even though there were so many gopis!

Kishoriji has also come there – ‘*taabhih same`taa*’ – and He is with all the gopis, smiling and laughing. He does leelas that delight the gopis. At times, He walks obliquely, or tugs at someone’s hair, or holds someone’s hand as they walk. They are some distance away from the sandy bank of the Jamuna, where the Maha Raas will be held. Kanhaiya has gathered the whole group of gopis, and is going there, frolicking as they go. The gopis are filled with bliss.

Once Prabhu gave His consent to the Raas, the Devtas also gathered in the sky. Until now, they were watching the leela of viyoga and tears. The Devtas thought, ‘Who knows what leela is being enacted in this weeping and lamenting? Why should we go?’ When they saw that the leela of anand was about to start, they began to watch His sublime leela of sublime bliss. Great Mahapurush and Saints, whose hair has turned white with age, yearn to obtain a glimpse of Prabhu.

The same Prabhu is now catching the hand of some gopi, teasing some gopi, and joking with some gopi. He tugs at some gopi’s plait. ‘This is the Brahman incarnate!’ think the Devtas. ‘He is conquered by prema.’ If this Brahman has been conquered by anyone, it is by the people of Vraja. ‘*Taahi ahira kee chohariyaa chachiyaa bhara chaacha te`naacha nachaave`.*’ (He dances at the bidding of the milkmaids, in exchange of a little buttermilk!) The Devtas and the Devis in the sky watch this scene with astonishment, sitting in their air planes in the sky. It is such a magnanimous leela.

Then, when they reach the Jamunaji’s sandy bank, it seems that here, too, Prakriti Devi (the goddess Nature) is a maid servant of Prabhu. She has organized everything. What has she organized?

The sandy bank of Jamunaji looks like a stage. Jamunaji has made her bank absolutely level and smooth. What are Jamunaji’s hands? They are the ripples of water. Kalindi (another name for Jamunaji)’s ripples have prepared the ground. And, when the cool breeze touches the rippling water and comes to Shri Krishna and the gopis, it is very refreshing.

The night of the brightest moon in the year – the full moon of the Sharad (Autumn) is beginning, Maharaj! The moon shines overhead and the sand shines underfoot, bright as a snow-capped mountain. There is a gateway here. Later on, you will hear another description of the sand. Here, the sand is described as white as snow. At the time of the Maha Raas the sand is a mixture of black and white grains.

You may ask, ‘How did this happen?’ The answer is that Prakriti was immersed in the leela that was taking place. Kanhaiya was dark and the gopis were fair. So, half the sand became black and half remained white. The grains partial to Kanhaiya became black, and the grains that favored the gopis remained white. They mingled and participated in the Maha Raas. This is how engrossed all Nature was in this Maha Raas leela.

One or two shlokas that are given here create a doubt in people’s mind. ‘*Baahu prasaara parir bhakaraalakoru.*’ Bhagwan Shri Krishna catches some gopi’s hand, and some gopi’s waist. He puts His hand on some gopi’s shoulder. What is He doing? ‘*Muttambhayan rati patim.*’ He is awakening desire. Why? This is a beautiful formula. Is *kaama* (desire) to be awoken when it is needed, or is it to be awoken when it is missing? Yes! The word used here is *muttambhayan*.

Kamadev, poor chap, had already run to hide in a corner. Bhagwan Shri Krishna places His hand on a gopi’s shoulder. His hand encircles a gopi’s waist. He puts a hand on a gopi’s head. He gives sidelong glances to Kamadev. Why? ‘Enter this leela, if you can!’ *Muttambhayan* – He is rousing and challenging Kamadev repeatedly, to drag this divine leela down to the level of worldly lust. This is to invite desire to open battle!

One Saint says that Kamadev told Bhagwan Shri Krishna, ‘I have defeated Shiva and Brahma. Only you are left. I want to have a show of strength with you.’ Bhagwan thought, ‘This son of Mine has developed great pride.’ Shri Krishna’s son, Pradyumna, is an Avatar of Kamadev. When Bhagwan Shankar burnt Kamadev to ashes, his wife, Rati, obtained the boon that he would be born as Shri Krishna’s son. Today, the son is preparing to do battle with his father. He is very impertinent. Very well. How will he fight? Does he want to fight in an open field or does he want to lay siege to the father protected by a fort?

A battle that is fought from the safety of a fort is the Grihastha Ashram (the stage of the married householder). Kamadev said, ‘It is easy to win a battle if you are safe in a fort. Come onto the open field, and then I will know that You have conquered me.’ Shyam Sunder has accepted his challenge and come into the open field to fight with Kamadev.

People read these shlokas and wonder what Kanhaiya is doing. Just see the word that is used in all these shlokas – *muttambhayan*. Prabhu is challenging the husband of Rati – Kamadev – to open battle. He teases Kamadev, ‘Come; overcome Me, if you can!’ Maharajji has pinpointed this word. He said that desire must be aroused where it is absent. What is the need to arouse something that is already aroused? Desire needs to be awoken in the heart that is *nishkaama* (without desire), or *akaama* (where desires don’t exist).

The gopis are not bothered about their lives. They don’t even have a desire to stay alive or obtain *sukha* (happiness) How can desire enter a person who is ready to give

up his life? Even so, Kamadev stood up, so Shri Krishna challenged him by doing all the romantic gestures, and danced with the gopis. *Taataa thai! Taataa thai!* The Devtas began to play their *dundubhi*. They became so enthralled by the scene that they forgot that Kamadev was one of them. They felt attached to Shri Krishna. They beat their drums and showered celestial flowers. Shri Krishna is dancing and making all the gestures of common love-making. He holds some gopi close, places His hand on some gopi's shoulder, or around a gopi's waist, and goes on dancing. The gopis are filled with divine bliss. This is a divine leela, and the Devis and Devtas hover in the sky, watching the scene below.

Kamadev stood by, defeated and trembling, when Shankar Bhagwan came there, filled with happiness. 'It is the same Kama who had annoyed me,' he thought. Bhagwan Shankar went forward to join in the leela, but someone stopped him. 'In this leela, there is only one *poorva purusha* (primordial male), Shri Krishna. No other male can enter.' Bhole Baba (Bhagwan Shankar) said, 'This is a leela that has no scope for kama. I also wish to enter into this leela.'

'For that, you will have to become a gopi. You cannot enter as Bhole Baba.'

'I am prepared to change.'

'Bathe in a *kunda* (walled pool of water) and come. Get the blessing of some gopi. Only then will we make you a gopi.'

Kishoriji gave her blessings; Bhole Baba became a gopi, and joined the Maha Raas. Even today, there is a temple of Gopeshwar Mahadev in Vrindavan. It is the same Ishwara – Mahadev – who became a gopi to participate in the Maha Raas with Bhagwan.

Bhole Baba has joined them. Thousands of gopis are dancing. Kishoriji is there. Imagine the scene. Meditate upon this leela. Dwell upon this divine leela, and worldly joys will seem fleeting in comparison. This leela will continuously enhance your inner joy. Worldly desires increase our sorrow; this leela increases our happiness.

This raas is called the '*laghu raas*' (small raas). Let Prabhu and His beloved gopis rest awhile. Tomorrow we will talk about what happens next.

(Discourse of the fifth day)

We are all back in Prabhu's divine leela of the Maha Raas. In this leela, Prabhu exposed the prema that was hidden in the hearts of the gopis, and He started the Raas with them. He danced in many different ways to give them pleasure.

Shri Maharajji used to say that a dance that has one male and many female dancers is also called a Raas. Here, Shri Krishna is dancing with the gopis of Vraja, on the purifying sand beside the Jamuna. The Sharad Purnima moon shines above. The air is filled with the delicious fragrance of aurak flowers. The water of the Kalindi cools the breeze. The sky is filled with Devtas. The atmosphere is divine. Even the Devtas get tempted by the bliss of this dance.

This leela of Thakurji is divine. Not only is it supremely divine, it also shows how sadhana progresses. It is an indication of how a sadhaka ultimately reaches Bhagwan, and the kind of experiences he has on the path of sadhana. Shri Shukadevji Maharaj says that after doing Raas for some time, there was a change in the feeling of the gopis. *'E`vam bhagavatah krishnaallabdhamanaa mahaatmanah aatmaanam streenaam moninyobhyadhikam bhruvi. Taasaam tat saubhagamadam veekshya maanam cha ke`shavah, prashamaaya prasaadaaya tatraivaantaradheeyata.'* The gopis' feeling changed.

Bhagwan's leela is unique! Just a short while back the gopis had been pleading for Bhagwan's grace. Now, a touch of pride crept into their heart. What caused this change? It was pride of their own good fortune. *'Taasaam tat saubhagamadam'*.

Shri Maharajji has given two interpretations of *saubhaagya* (good fortune). The gopis feel, 'We are so lucky! Prabhu is dancing with us with so much love, that this Maha Raas tempts even the Devtas. Even Bhagwan Siva has entered this divine leela. Prabhu places His hand on our shoulders. He holds our hand. He loves us so much! He showers His love on us. How lucky we are!' That was enough! Their focus shifted away from Bhagwan to Bhagwan's Grace on them. As long as Bhagwan was their focus, there was no viyog. As soon as it shifted to their own good fortune, they had to experience the anguish of separation.

These are such subtle dangers that only Bhagwan can keep a bhakta safe from them. The gopis thought, 'We are so beautiful and fortunate, that Bhagwan Krishna accepted us. All others watch us, wishing they could participate and be as lucky as we are.'

Bhagwan Shri Krishna sees everything. He is seated in their hearts, too. He is smiling. 'Oh, so you are fortunate, are you? In spite of being in front of Me, your mind moved away from Me, to yourselves, didn't it?' Yes! Our Maharajji would say that Bhagwan thought to Himself, 'I was in front of them, but their mind turned away from Me; they began to think about themselves. Let them have their own company for a while. Had they needed Me so much, well, I was dancing with them! We were doing the Raas leela together. Despite this, their thoughts shifted to their own good fortune and beauty. They do not need Me now.'

This is what Bhagwan Shri Krishna sees. The power of His leela is wonderful. Our Maharajji would say, *'Je`hee jasa raghupati karahi taba so tasa te`hee chhina hoye –*

who knows when which bhakta will enter what state?’ Only Prabhu knows this. Even the bhakta doesn’t know what will happen when.

Neither you nor I can imagine that the gopis – who were weeping so desperately, whose life spirit was on the verge of leaving their bodies – could get pride after doing Raas with Shri Krishna in just a little while. Who could imagine that their focus would move away from Kanhaiya, to their own good fortune? That they would stop thinking about Shri Krishna and start thinking about themselves?

This is one side of the matter. The gopis developed pride. What about Kishoriji?

Maharajji would say that a person can achieve 50% success in sadhana through Dharma nishtha, and 99% through bhakti. However, Brahmavidya is the only way to obtain 100% success. If the bhakti is indeed *nishkapata* (without personal motivation), a person will become free of worldly dilemmas. However, there will always be some tussle with Bhagwan. There will be prema and viyog. This will continue until the bhakta becomes *gnaaninishtha* (established in Gnan). This truth should be acknowledged by even the premi bhaktas (bhaktas who have absolute love for only Bhagwan). This is a fact, because Bhagwan gives a sermon on Tattvagnan (knowledge about the essence of the Brahman) to the gopis – who are possibly the greatest bhaktas ever. And, this is the specialty of the Bhagwat. This episode gives this example that the devotion of the gopis was so total that their minds did not turn towards the world; but – it did turn towards themselves.

The principle is that everything is dear for the sake of the self, until the essence of the Self is experienced. ‘*Aatmanaastu kaamaaya sarvapriyam bhavati.*’ Shri Maharajji would speak with great reticence when he spoke about his episode. He would say that the words, ‘*Aatmanaastukaamaayaa sarvapriyam bhavati*’ mean that until the time when Prabhu is experienced as our Atma, it is not possible to have a complete removal of all dilemmas. This is what this episode explains.

This episode shows the highest degree of bhakti. All of you know about it, and the original shlokas that are given here. The gopis developed pride about their good fortune, and Shri Radha Rani shows some *maana* (feeling offended, due to ego being hurt). Shri Kishoriji is an inseparable part of Shri Krishna. Her essence is not separate from Shyam Sunder. So you can say that this was her leela. She showed maan to Shri Krishna.

Why was she displeased?

Shri Kishoriji thought, ‘Doesn’t Shri Krishna love me more than any other?’ Even though this was a sport, she felt offended that the other gopis had been given the same level of importance. She no longer felt special.

Worldly dilemmas will be resolved in a bhakta’s life, but they will have their own dilemmas unless and until they experience Prabhu as their own Atma. That is why it is stated that 100% understanding. Bhakti gives 99%. There is a difference of only 1%; no more.

What does this indicate? There are many episodes in the Bhagwat. A bhakta asked Bhagwan for a varadaan. ‘Grant me a varadaan for the time I go to Your land after leaving this life.’

‘What varadaan do you want for there? You are coming to My land anyway.’

‘I want the varadaan of Your *charana se`vaa* (serving Your feet).’

‘What is the need to ask for this? Isn’t it natural that I would grant this to a bhakta like you?’

‘Prabhu’, said the bhakta. ‘You will grant me this seva, but I am afraid of a problem cropping up.’

‘What problem?’

‘One lady is already there, who serves Your feet.’

Who is she?

‘Laxmiji!’

‘What do you wish to say?’

You see, Prabhu also loves His bhaktas. And, this is a bhakta of a high caliber. This bhakta says, ‘Both Laxmiji and I will serve Your feet when I come to Vaikuntha. A dispute regarding our seva will surely arise some day.’

‘What are you trying to tell Me?’

‘I want You to grant me the varadaan now, that when a dispute arises about Your charan seva, You will not side with Laxmiji; You will favor me. Please give me this varadaan in advance.’

So, what does that indicate? You may reach Vaikuntha, or any other land, but a fact is a fact. These are books that highlight the importance of bhakti, and this episode of the Maha Raas is the leela that depicts the zenith of bhakti. The difference is that some premi bhaktas need a Guru, but some don’t, because Bhagwan becomes their Guru and gives them *upade`sha* (sermons; spiritual teaching).

Just as Bhagwan gave upadesha to the gopis, He gave upadesha to Devki and Vasudev, and also to Maharaja Dashrath. Bhagwan became their Guru and gave them the highest teaching.

The difference that remains is that *poornataa* (wholeness, fulfillment) is obtained only when a bhakta ultimately experiences Bhagwan as his own Atma. Now, Kishoriji got maan, and was a little disgruntled with Bhagwan. Bhagwan saw that these two obstacles had cropped up in the Maha Raas. If you are absolutely close to obtaining Bhagwan, and pride about the power of your sadhana creeps in – or, your focus shifts away from Bhagwan – it is an obstacle in sadhana. These obstacles delay our attaining Prabhu.

Shukadevji has said that Shri Krishna Avatar contains sixteen *kalaas* (special qualities). ‘*Akhila kalaadi guru* – the original Guru of all the kalaas.’ This is what Shukadevji has written about Shri Krishna.

Shri Krishna did a leela that solved both obstacles. Kishoriji had become *maanavati* (having maan, because of hurt pride) and the gopis had become *garvavati* (having pride, because of their good fortune). Bhagwan thought, ‘When you feel that you are *saubhaagyavati*, stay by yourselves for a while. You will find out the extent of your beauty and good fortune.’ He also wanted to cajole and appease Kishoriji.

Bhagwan lead Kishoriji aside as they danced, and became invisible to the gopis doing the Maha Raas. As soon as He vanished, the Maha Raas became a *laghu* (small) Raas. Shukadevji says that the attention of the gopis shifted for just a moment, and ‘*antarhite` bhagavati sahasaiva vrajaanganaah.*’ As soon as their vision turned inwards (to their own good fortune), Bhagwan disappeared from their view. Our Maharajji would joke about it. He would say that it is true that the clear

meaning of the word '*antardhyaana*' is to disappear, to vanish; but how did He disappear? You see, Kanhaiya wanted to see what the gopis did when they could no longer see Him. So, how did He vanish?

The *chunaree* (cloth worn over the head) of a gopis fell off as she danced. The gopis were so engrossed in dancing that they did not notice that Bhagwan picked up the *chunaree* and covered Himself with it. Then He sat quietly among them, as though He was one of them.

This is one viewpoint about how Bhagwan vanished. Bhagwan wanted to see, and look after the gopis. Now, with the *chunaree* covering Him, who could tell whether it is a gopa (cowherd) or a gopi? Kishoriji was wearing a *chunaree*; now Kanhaiya also wore a *chunaree*.

You may have heard from Maharajji, about what happened once with Pujya Udiyababaji Maharaj. He was a great Mahatma, and the Guruji of our Guruji. Once, Baba stayed at a place for some days. It is natural that people try to cling to a pure hearted Saint. Baba would say that he wanted to leave, but the people would catch his feet and beg of him to stay. They would begin to weep at the thought of his going.

Do you know what trick Baba used? Maharajji would narrate it to us, and this is an absolutely true story. Baba called one of his disciples. This disciple was a family man who lived in that city. 'Look, my brother,' said Baba. 'I will have to leave this place now. It is a Sadhu's job to not stay in one place for long. These people have so much love for me that they don't let me leave.'

'Then how can we leave?'

'Get ready to leave, and bring a *chunaree* with you. I will wear the *chunaree* and follow you. You tell people that you are going somewhere with your wife.'

Just think of it – this actually happened! This is how Baba left that town. He wrapped a sari round himself and covered his head with a *chunaree*. Now, if someone is taking his wife somewhere, who is there to question it? Baba slipped out of the town. People found out later. It is true that they were sad, but it was also a good joke.

In the same way, Thakurji hid under a *chunaree*. Then the gopis' condition became very strange. Shukadevji Maharaj has described it so vividly that it seems as though he is actually watching them. Shukadevji said that when the gopis realized that Shri Krishna had vanished, they fainted, and fell to the ground. It was a great shock for them. Kanhaiya was their life! He gave them so much love! They had been filled with such bliss, and suddenly He vanished! The shock was so acute that they lost consciousness for a while. They fell senseless to the ground.

A little later they regained their senses. In the language of bhakti this can be called the *mahaa bhaava* (the great emotion), and in worldly parlance it can be called madness. The gopis showed signs of insanity. You will ask, 'What signs of insanity did they show?'

The gopis were in thousands. They were surrounded by tall trees. The gopis began to talk to the trees. 'Oh, tree! You are very tall. The life of our life – our Thakurji – has left us and gone away. Please look all around and tell us which way he has gone, in this forest. Where is He hiding?' They asked these questions to the trees.

There was no question about getting an answer from the trees. When no reply came, the gopis said, 'These trees will not help us.'

‘Why won’t they help us?’

‘They are proud of their great height. When people become elevated, they become vain. They don’t want to talk to those they consider to be beneath them.’

They looked around and saw a Tulsi (basil) shrub growing close to the Jamunaji. ‘*Kacchittulasi kalyaani govindacharanapriye*` – Tulsi! You are fortunate. You are the beloved of Govind (another name of Shri Krishna). Bhagwan loves you so dearly that He will not eat without you. He won’t accept any offering unless a Tulsi leaf is placed on it. You will surely be knowing where Shri Krishna has gone. Tulsi! We bow at your feet! Just tell us where He is hiding.’ The gopis looked pleadingly at the Tulsi shrub for some time.

When there was no response, one gopi said, ‘Tulsi won’t tell us!’

‘Why won’t she tell us?’

‘She is Bhagwan’s wife, so she is jealous of the other women who love Him. That’s why she won’t tell us where He is.’

The mango tree did not reply, the banyan tree did not reply, and the Tulsi shrub did not reply either. The gopis think that they are refusing to respond. You can call it *mahaa bhaava*, or you can call it madness. The gopis went a bit further. The night had also progressed a little, and you must be knowing that dew falls constantly on the night of the Sharad Purnima. The ground was covered with lush green grass, covering the sandy bank of the Jamunaji.

Now, see the *bhaava* that the gopis get. This is the viewpoint of a bhakta. Grass has sprouted on *bhoo de`vee* (the goddess Earth, who is also Bhagwan’s wife). The tufts of grass are covered with dewdrops. The gopis say, ‘Oh, Bhu Devi, you are shedding tears of prema. Your body has goose pimples of ecstasy. You must be knowing where Shri Krishna is; that is why you are thrilled. You are sure to know where He, who our heart worships, has gone. He is our all-in-all.’

When no answer came from Bhu Devi, the gopis say, ‘Her state is the same as Tulsi’s. Bhu Devi is also Bhagwan’s wife, like Shri Devi (Laxmiji). She is experiencing bliss. She feels that she will be deprived if she tells us where Shyam Sunder is. She will not tell us.’

The gopis moved on. They saw a deer bounding ahead on the sandy bank. Just a few years ago there were a lot of deer and nilgai. We could see them. They were one of Vrindavan’s unique sights. Yes! So then, the gopis saw a deer lope away into the night. Animals come to the Jamunaji at night to drink water. This deer drank her fill and was going back to her herd.

‘This deer is full of joy; she is with a herd,’ thought the gopis. ‘The way this deer is prancing, it seems that she is celebrating a great event. Such joy comes only when someone meets Shri Krishna. Who else can feel so happy?’ This is the viewpoint of a bhakta. Yes! If a bhakta sees anyone looking very happy, he thinks, ‘This person has met Shri Krishna. That is why he is filled with joy.’ And if a bhakta sees someone weep, he thinks that Shri Krishna must have left him and gone away, and that is why he is weeping. The thoughts of a bhakta go nowhere else.

The gopis ask the deer, ‘Please tell us where you are running to; where is our Kanhaiya? You have had His darshan. You are prancing with joy. Where is that Nata Nagara, the beloved of our *praana* (life spirit)? Please tell us where the Ishwara of

our heart is hiding.’ The deer ran off. ‘This deer is in no condition to answer us,’ said one gopi. ‘Let us follow her. She must be going to Kanhaiya.’

Now, see the world of the gopi’s mind. They run after the deer, thinking that she will lead them to Kanhaiya. They feel that she bounds so eagerly that she must be going to Him. Why do the gopis think this? It is because they had come running eagerly when they heard His flute. They had left their homes and families, and come running to Kanhaiya.

After about half a kilometer, the deer disappeared into the forest. In those days, Vrindavan was a forested area. Now it has developed into a small city. When the deer hid somewhere, the gopis thought that Kanhaiya must be hiding somewhere close by. They began to search among the shrubs on the bank of the Jamunaji, but could not find Him.

One gopis remembered a sermon she had once heard. ‘If we want to obtain Bhagwan, we should think of Him, meditate on Him, and enact His leelas. This pleases Bhagwan.’ They were already thinking about Him and meditating on Him. Now they began to enact His leelas. One gopi became Putana, and one gopi became Shri Krishna, and began to suckle her. One gopi got onto another’s shoulder, thinking her to be the Kaliya naag (the serpent on whose hoods Shri Krishna had danced). ‘Kaliya naag! Leave this pool and go away, otherwise I will crush you.’

Shukadevji says that one gopi held her *dupattaa* (scarf) above her head, balancing it on one finger. ‘*Vrajavaasi* (people of Vraja)! Don’t be afraid of Indra’s rain! I have lifted up the Giriraj. Come under the shelter of this mountain.’ They were so engrossed that they forgot it was only a scarf – not a mountain – the gopi was holding above her head! The gopis was calling all the people to come and shelter under her scarf!

And, yes! The peak of this delusion was when one gopi said, ‘*Krishnoham* (I am Krishna). *Pashya gatim lalitaamiti tanmanaah* (see My graceful gait).’ One gopi felt, ‘I am Krishna – who am I weeping for?’ Her love for Shri Krishna overwhelms her and she believes herself to be Krishna. She places her hand on another gopi’s shoulder, and dances like Shri Krishna. ‘Why are you weeping?’ she asks. ‘See, your Krishna has come!’ The other gopis look at her in surprise. What has happened to her? ‘Don’t you believe that I am Krishna?’ she asks. This is the height of madness! ‘*Krishnoham* – I am Kanhaiya!’

‘What is the proof?’

‘See how I walk! Isn’t my walk exactly like Krishna’s? *Lalitaami* – am I not as charming as Him? I am Krishna. Why do you weep?’ Shukadevji tells Raja Parikshit, ‘Rajan! Thakurji is also watching this leela of the gopis. He sees how they are effected by viraha. Bhagwan savors His bhakta’s prema. He watches their behavior when they are separated from Him. It is He who looks after them under all circumstances. He is always with them, but He enjoys watching the signs of their total love and absorption in Him.’

See how sadhana progresses. When the gopis failed to find Prabhu after these efforts, they started to look for Him again. When a person wants Krishna, he can’t sit in peace until he gets Him. This is the characteristic of a bhakta. Bhaktas try everything they can think of, to get Bhagwan. The gopis went ahead.

A little further, the gopis saw Shri Krishna's footprints on the sand. There are some divine signs on the soles of Shri Krishna's feet, like the *dhvaja* (flag), *ankusha* (the iron hook used to guide elephants). These were seen clearly in His footprints. That indicates how bright the moon was that night. The footprints looked very fresh, and the gopis felt encouraged to think that Kanhaiya was close by.

A little later they saw a gopi's footprints, along with Kanhaiya's. The gopis stopped in surprise, wondering who this gopi could be. 'Kanhaiya disappeared, but doesn't it seem that He took a gopi with Him? These footprints belong to a gopi.'

There is one thing in this leela that is not possible in this world. Had it been a worldly leela, the gopis would have been angry, wanting to know which gopi Kanhaiya had favored. The gopis are wonderful! Their prema is amazing! Their spontaneous reaction was, '*Anayaaraadhito noonam bhagavaan harireeshvarah!*' It shows the purity of their prema that they felt no jealousy or resentment. They rejoiced, 'At least this gopi obtained what we could not!'

What do we understand from this? It refers to the worship of Katyayini Devi, done by the gopis, asking that they get Kanhaiya as their husband. Now, they think, 'We had all done *aaraadhanaa* (worship), but only one gopi's worship was successful.' What a viewpoint! '*Anayaaraadhito noonam bhagavaan hirireeshvarah yanno vihaaya govindah preeto yaamanayad rahah.* The true worship is the worship of that gopi, who Bhagwan took with Him. Our worship was defective. *Anayaaraadhito* – had we worshipped wholeheartedly, He would have taken us with Him, when He vanished.'

The gopis' hearts began to melt. They continued searching. Then another leela took place. People who worship Kishoriji find it difficult to accept this leela. I had to study the Bhagwat for years before I understood its significance.

Do you know who was the gopi Bhagwan took with Him when He vanished? It was Shri Kishoriji, Shri Radha Rani! Bhagwan vanished from the view of the other gopis, taking her with Him. It was her footprints that the gopis saw. The gopis felt overwhelmed when they saw her footprints alongside Kanhaiya's.

Shukadevji tells us what happened. The gopi who accompanied Shri Krishna developed garva.

What garva did she develop?

'Shri Krishna left all the other gopis, and chose me to go with Him.'

Forgive me, listen to the whole story. Shri Kishoriji never gets garva. She is Shakti and Bhagwan is shaktimaan. They are one *praana* (life spirit) in two forms. Then – what is the purpose of this leela? I studied all the commentaries, but did not find an explanation. I asked a Saint who lives in Vrindavan, 'What is the significance of Shri Kishoriji getting garva? I can understand that the gopis got garva, but here it is Shri Kishoriji who got garva!' It is astonishing to see how this garva revealed itself.

Shri Kishoriji says, 'Shri Krishna, I can't walk any further. If You want me to go further into the forest, please arrange something.' Kishoriji knows fully well that no cart or mount is available in the forest. To tell Shri Krishna to arrange something is tantamount to telling Him to carry her! Can Kishoriji ever say such a thing? This is impossible, yet it happened! It is not a fragment of somebody's imagination – it is

given in the main text of the Bhagwat. Kishoriji tells Shri Krishna, ‘Arrange for my transport.’

The next this that happens clarifies the matter. When Kishoriji said this, Bhagwan Shri Krishna did a leela. ‘All right, Kishoriji, ‘ He said, ‘Nothing else is available, so I will sit down, and you climb onto My shoulder. I will carry you.’ Just see this leela. Bhagwan Shri Krishna is just eight years old. He sits on the sand, by the Jamunaji, and just as Kishoriji lifts up her foot, He disappears.

When Shri Krishna vanished from before their eyes, the gopis at least had the ability to walk and talk. Shri Kishoriji became incapable of even that. All she could do was to murmur a couple of His names. ‘*Haa naatha, ramana, pre`shtha, kvaasi kvaasi mahaabhuja* (Where have You gone?)’ She became unconscious. Commentators have written that every name she uttered manifested as a Thakurji in Vrindavan. The full power of Bhagwan’s name was manifested with each name Radha Rani took at that time. The meaning of the full power of the Name, is that Bhagwan’s *naama* (name) is spoken by you, and the *naamee* (the one whose name it is) manifests before you. This is the full power of His name.

Kishoriji said, ‘*Haa naatha* (O Lord),’ and Gopinath manifested. She said, ‘*Ramana*’, and Radharaman manifested. She said, ‘*Pre`shtha*’, and Radhavallabh manifested. She said, ‘*Mahaabhuja*’, and Banke Bihari manifested. One form manifested for each name Shri Kishoriji uttered. This is Shri Kishoriji’s extraordinary *shakti* (power) in the life of Shri Krishna. This is *prabhupre`ma* – love for Prabhu. Kishoriji swooned, after saying this. She was incapable of walking, or looking for Shri Krishna. She was not even able to pray!

The gopis found Kishoriji lying senseless, when they entered the arbor looking for Shri Krishna. They sprinkled water on her and began to fan her gently. When Kishoriji regained consciousness, they asked her what had happened. Kishoriji wept as she narrated the story. ‘I told Shri Krishna to arrange for me to be carried! How could this thought even come to me? Shri Krishna disappeared, and left me, because of my bad behavior.’

Shri Krishna wanted the gopis’ *garva* to be uprooted completely, and Shri Kishoriji participated in this leela. ‘*Yogamaayaa upaashritah*’ (Shri Krishna took the help of His Yogamaya, His power of illusion. Shri Radha Rani is Yogamaya). The gopis understood that if Shri Krishna can leave even Shri Kishoriji at one comment, could He ever accept them for their physical beauty or good fortune? Their earlier pride was uprooted before Shri Krishna showed Himself.

Kishoriji had done all this to uproot all pride from the gopis’ hearts. It was a role she played, because Kishoriji can never have pride. By doing this leela, she successfully destroyed all the gopis’ pride without sermonizing. ‘If Shyam Sunder can give up even Shri Kishoriji, what are we, compared to her?’ The gopis attained their natural state (being free of the subtle ego of individuality). They began to experience the emptiness in which Prabhu is obtained. Accompanied by Kishoriji, they renewed their search. ‘Kanhaiya! Where can we find You?’ This description is given in the main text. The gopis see Shri Krishna’s footprints, but they can’t find Him.

This is also Bhagwan’s wonderful leela, that the gopis keep getting signs of His presence. Bhagwan Shri Krishna is afraid that if they get no sign of Him at all, they

may be harmed. He lets them see His footprints, to make sure that their prana does not leave their body. This is His method of revealing the bhakti of His bhaktas, and also safeguarding their lives.

The gopis continued to follow Bhagwan's footprints. They came to a dense part of the forest where even the bright moonlight did not filter through the treetops. Bhagwan's footprints could be seen even in the darkness, but the gopis felt they should go no further.

Why? Were they afraid of the dark? Did they fear some harm coming to them? No! The gopis' prema is extraordinary. If you and I study the chapters one by one, we will get a glimmer of the purity of their love. Is there anyone today, who can compare with the gopis? Brahma and Uddhav long to get the dust of the gopis' feet! Are we to gauge their love with our impure minds? Are we in any position to do research and comment on their character? That is a disgracefully lowly idea.

Then, why is it that the gopis went no further into the forest? See one sentence of theirs; see their thinking! The gopis felt, 'We are following Shri Krishna's footprints, but He will go deeper into the forest to hide from us. He is our all in all; He is our prana! The thorns that lie on the ground will pierce His feet before they pierce ours! Our Kanhaiya will get pain, because of us.' Just see their feelings and comments! Just see how they react at every step!

'We will be the cause of Kanhaiya's discomfort, if we go further.'

Why?

'Our life belongs to Him. It is for Him, to make Him happy; not to give Him discomfort!' The gopis stop searching, so that Kanhaiya doesn't have to go deeper into the dark forest.

What are they to do now? They are faced with the same dilemma once more. They can't bear to do nothing. 'What should we do? We can't look for Him. We didn't find Him, and we can't live without Him.'

Perhaps it was Prabhu who gave them this thought. 'We have heard – and it has also been our experience – that Prabhu is not obtained by our seeking. (Seeking refers to sadhana.) We cannot obtain Prabhu by our own efforts; He is obtained only by His own Grace. We tried so hard to find Him, but couldn't. If He wants, He will come to us on the sandy bank where He left us. If He does not want to meet us, we can search the whole forest but we won't find Him!' As soon as this thought came, they went with Kishoriji, to the spot where the Maha Raas had started. Kalindi – who was later to become one of Shri Krishna's *pataraani* (principal Queens) – had prepared this divine spot for the Maha Raas. They went back there, but what were they to do?

'If He wants to meet us, He will come here; otherwise we will never find Him, no matter how hard we search.' But, are they to sit idle? How can their love let them do nothing? The sadhana that is initially done with an effort becomes natural when bhakti comes. The gopis began to pray to Shri Krishna.

This prayer of the gopis is called 'Gopi Geet' – the song of the gopis – in the Shrimad Bhagwat. It is the final appeal of the gopis to Shri Krishna. After this, they become incapable of even praying to Him. They fall into a semi-conscious state. Just see how beautiful is the combination of sadhana and *kripaa* (Grace), in this sublime episode. Bhagwan manifests before them when they become silent. This is the zenith

of sadhana. Kripa begins where sadhana ends. It manifests as soon as the bhakta becomes incapable of further effort. This is what this episode shows. This episode is sublime from every viewpoint.

So, the gopis sit with Kishoriji on the sand by the Jamunaji, and call out to Prabhu. They pray to Him. This Gopi Geet is their calling out to Bhagwan. Its *chhanda* (meter) is called the ‘Kanak Manjari’ chhand. The word ‘kanak’ has two meanings – gold, and *dhatooraa* (an intoxicating seed). So, the indication is that unless a person is attached to Narayana, he gets intoxicated by wealth and dhatura.

What is the indication of giving this name, ‘Kanak Manjari’, to this meter? If we think a little, did the gopis compose their prayer in this meter? Did they even know how to compose music? Had they been taught Sanskrit? The gopis knew nothing! It was only after this song flowed out from their heart that Saints understood its greatness. They considered the name and form it should be given. In my opinion, this prayer would have been sung spontaneously, and named Kanak Manjari subsequently. The style of the song would have been decided later on. The gopis were in no condition to sing or compose a prayer that is so technically perfect. What emerged naturally from the gopi’ heart became music.

Our Maharajji used to say, ‘The speech that is spoken for Prabhu is music.’ Only the words that are spoken for Prabhu are music, and hence the gopis’ prayer automatically became music. That is why Gopi Geet is so special.

I did not know the meaning of the Gopi Geet when I was still a student, studying the Bhagwat. Once, I had gone to see a Raas leela. Raas leelas are organized in Vrindavan, at Holi, and in the month of Shravan. This Maha Raas was organized at the Ashram of Swami Ramswarup Sharma, who was famous as a director of the Raas leela. Swamiji sang the Gopi Geet in the Kanak Manjari chhand. That day, I experienced the thrilling pathos of this prayer, even though I did not know what the words meant. I couldn’t understand the cause of its impact on me. What is the power that sends the song straight to the heart, even when the words are not understood?

Later on I learnt that this is the prana of the gopis. The gopis’ essence is Krishna prema – love for Shri Krishna; and this song is their life spirit. Yes! It has a power even when it is not understood intellectually. Think of the result, if someone sings it with understanding! Krishna prema will come into the heart of anyone who recites it every day. This is the power of this prayer!

I will show you the style in which it is sung.

Jayati te`dhikam janmanaa vrajah shrayata indiraa shashvadatrahi. Dayita drishyataam deekshu taavakaa tvayidhritaasava tvaamvichinvate`.

Nineteen shlokas of this song are in this chapter, and the remaining three of its twenty-two shlokas are given in the following chapter. If we sing the Gopi Geet in this rhythm and tune, every day, we will develop love for Shri Krishna. If there is the slightest trace of love in our heart, it will thrill us, even if we don’t understand the words. This is not only my experience; other people have also had the same experience.

The gopis say, ‘*Jayati te`dhikam janma naa vrajah* – since You were born here, Vraja has attained a greater glory. People say, “*Jai! Jai!* (Victory to Vraja! Long live Vraja!)”.’

What is the victory about?

‘Vraja has obtained a glory even greater than Vaikunth’s (the land of Bhagwan Vishnu).’ The gopis are describing Shri Krishna’s greatness. His greatness is seen more clearly, now that the gopis are separated from Him. When the gopis worshipped Katyayani Devi, they had prayed, ‘*Nanda gopasuta de`vee* – let the son of Nanda be our husband.’ Now, they sing, ‘You always live in Vaikunth, but Vraja has attained a higher status since You took birth here.’

How is that?

‘We will explain. *Shrayata indiraa shashvadatrahi*. Indira (Laxmiji) always renders service here, in Vraja, now.’

Who does she serve?

‘She tends each and every creeper, tree, cowherd and calf. She makes all the arrangements for the Maha Raas, on the sandy bank of the Jamunaji.’

Then, what are you trying to say, gopis?

‘Laxmiji is the Maharani at Vaikunth. But in Vraja, she is a servant. Now You can understand which is greater – Vaikunth or Vraja! Great Rishis and Saints take the refuge of Laxmiji in Vaikunth. Elevated souls eulogize her, and sing her praises there. But here, in Vraja, she looks after all the creepers, leaves and flowers.’

Why does she do this?

‘Kanhaiya, You are very fond of lotus flowers, aren’t You? That is why Laxmiji looks after each lotus with her own hands.’

What for?

‘Laxmiji knows that when Kanhaiya is with the premis of Vraja, He won’t even look at her. The gopis and gwaal baals are such loving bhaktas of His that Laxmiji gets scant importance here. So, she found this method.’

Which method?

‘Every day, lotus flowers are taken to You, Kanhaiya. Laxmiji knows that when she tends to the flowers, the fragrance of her body will be carried along with the flowers. When You lift up the flowers to inhale their fragrance, You will also get her fragrance. You will know that she is rendering service here, in Vraja.’

Laxmiji wants Shri Krishna to be aware of her presence in Vraja. Kanhaiya doesn’t even look at her, so she wants to convey, ‘Prabhu, I am involved in serving Your bhaktas.’ That is why the gopis sing, ‘*Shrayata indiraa* – Laxmiji – always serves Vraja, and this is Vraja’s victory over Vaikunth.’

What is the purpose of saying this?

‘What glory for Vraja! All the people here are so joyful, Shyam Sunder! We also live in Vraja, Kanhaiya; if Vraja is victorious, we should also be victorious. There are two points here, Kanhaiya. If we are unhappy and defeated, it is very painful. Although we also live here, aren’t we given the privilege of being called ‘*vrajavaasi*’ (people of Vraja) yet? Don’t we qualify as Vrajavasis? If we are Vrajavasis, we should also be filled with joy.’

What do you want to say?

‘Our happiness has just one source – You! Having You with us makes us happy. If You wish to give us the status of Vrajavasis – if You consider us to be inhabitants of

Vraja – please accept our prayer. Please appear before us. Please forgive our offence.’ This is how the gopis eulogize Bhagwan and pray to Him.
Tomorrow, we will talk about the rest of the Gopi Geet. The time is up for today.

(Discourse of the sixth day)

We return to Bhagwan's supremely sublime leela, the Maha Raas, filled with bhakti. This episode describes the sadhana of a bhakta, and gives many useful indications. It tells us the condition in which Bhagwan is obtained. It explains how a bhakta gets the experience of Bhagwan, and the subtle obstacles that crop up on the path of sadhana. Using the gopis' example, we get to know both aspects – the aspect of the sweetest of all the *rasa* (deep emotions that enrich life), and of sadhana. Gopi Geet is the name given to the gopis' last prayer, their final, desperate call to Shri Krishna. It is their heart, and Bhagwan made it known to us. Had Bhagwan not disappeared, the Gopi Geet may never have emerged at all, since the dalliance of the Raas had already begun. Had this leela of viyog not taken place, there would have been no occasion for the Gopi Geet to arise. This is also a divine leela of Bhagwan. Yesterday, you heard one meter. Today, you will hear some more.

*Jayati te`dhikam janmanaa vrajah shrayata indiraa shashvadatra hi,
Dayita drishyataam dikshu taavakaa tvayidhritaasavas tvaamvichinvate`. 1
Saradudaashaye`saadhujaatasat sarasijodarashreemushaa drishaa,
Suratanaathate`ashulkadaasikaa varada nighnato ne`ha kim vadhah.2
Vishajalaapyayaad vyaalaraakshasaad varshamaarutaad vaidyutaamayaat,
Vrishamayaatmajaad vikshatobhayaad rishabhate`vayam rakshitaa muhuh.3*

This is how the Gopi Geet is sung. The gopis say, 'Shyam Sunder, we are looking for You in all directions. We searched in all eight directions but couldn't find You. How is it that we are still alive? *Tvayidhritaasava* – our prana is with You. Had our life spirit been with us, perhaps Dharma Raj (the presiding deity of death) would have taken it away. *Yama aataa hai, para praana paata naahi* – Yama Raj (another name for Dharma Raj) comes repeatedly, but finds no prana in our body. What can he take away? Our prana is with You, our mind is with You, and our intellect is with You. Shyam Sunder, death comes in many forms. The demise of the body is not the only form of death. *Sarasijodara shreemushaadrishaa'*.

I am amazed when I read the examples these rustic gopis – who had no formal learning – gave to Shri Krishna. *Sarasijodarashree mushaadrishaa*. The lotus that blooms quickly has a reddish tinge. 'Your eyes have the same reddish tinge. You gave us a look; that was another method of killing us. *Ne`ha kim vadhah* – is physical death the only dying? You vanquished us by Your look. If You are there, our prana is there; if You are not there, our prana is not there either.

Shyam Sunder, if our condition is not a problem for You – if You want to give us death – why did You save us on so many occasions? The gwaal baal and the calves had gone into the mouth of the demon Aghasura. Had You not protected them, the Vrajavasis would have died of their viraha. They would have died then and there. They would also have died had You not conquered the Kaliya nag. They would have died, had You not lifted up the Giriraj to save us from Indra's wrath.

You always protected and saved us. Having saved us, Prabhu, please don't allow us to die because of viyog. If we die of viyog, it will be very painful for us. If You have decided that our life should end, let it be in such a way that the blame does not come on You.'

See the gopi's point of view. Even in the throes of viraha, they are not worried about themselves. They are concerned about what people will say about Shri Krishna, and about His love. The gopis said, 'Had we died during those episodes, people would have blamed Aghasura, Indra, or Kaliya nag. Nobody would have blamed You, Kanhaiya! But if we die today, the whole world will blame You. People will say, "These are the very gopis Krishna had accepted. He played His flute to summon them, and then He let them die in the agony of viraha!" Kanhaiya, this is what we are afraid of. A slur may be cast on Your good name.' This is total devotion!

Take a look, and see if there is any premi in the world today, who thinks like this. Every word and every viewpoint of the gopis – even amid the terrifying state of viraha – is far from the reaction of ordinary people. The focus of the gopis is Shri Krishna's happiness, His position in society.

'You are not the son of Yashoda, Kanhaiya,' say the gopis. Bhagwan's magnificence shines more brightly in His absence! '*Na khalu gopikaanandano bhavaanakhilade`hinaam antaraatmadrik.* You are not just Nanda and Yashoda's son; You are established in the heart of every being – *akhilade`hinaam antaraatmadrik.*'

How did the gopis obtain such Gnan? It is as though being separated from Shri Krishna resulted in Gnan being awoken in them. 'You reside in all hearts, as the *antaryaami*. Brahma prayed to You, to take an Avatar on this earth.'

For what purpose?

'*Vishvaguptaye`* - to protect the world. Well, Kanhaiya, we are also in this world, aren't we? If You have indeed taken birth on earth at Brahma's prayer, please protect us as well, Kanhaiya, because we are also on this earth.'

At this point, Vishwanath Chakravarty gives an interpretation that this has more than one indication. '*Nakhalu gopikaanandano bhavaan*' can be interpreted in two ways. If *na* is put first, the meaning is, 'You are not the son of Yashoda'. Then, as though Kanhaiya asked, 'How can you say that I am not Yashoda's son?'

The gopis say, 'A child always inherits some of his parents' traits. Mother Yashoda is so compassionate! Her heart is so tender and kind. When we ask her for something, she at once gives us more than we need. She cannot bear to see us in any sort of difficulty. Had You been her son, You would also have had some compassion in Your heart. You would not have been able to bear to see us weeping like this. This proves, *na khalu gopikaanandano bhavaan* – You are not Yashoda's son.'

Kanhaiya said, 'All right; I am not the son of only one father and one mother. I am the *antaryaami* of all.'

The gopis refute this statement. '*Na khalu* – You are not even the *antaryaami* of all – *akhilade`hinaam antaraatma drik.*' The gopis are not prepared to accept that Shri Krishna abides in all hearts.

Kanhaiya said, 'You say that I am not the *antaryaami*? All the Vedas and Shastras say that I abide in all hearts. All the Saints say so. Yet, you refuse to accept it?'

'Had You been the *antaryaami* – if You were present in all hearts – You would also be present in our hearts. Had You been present in our hearts, You would have known the extent of our suffering. And, if You had known how greatly we suffer, You

would never have remained hidden! This proves that You are not the one who lives in all hearts. You are not *akhilade`hinaam antaraatmadrik.*'

Bhagwan thought, 'This is an extraordinary interpretation! The meaning of the words is changed completely!' He said, 'Do you know, gopis, that I took this Avatar because of Brahma's prayer?'

Vikhanasaa bhramanaa arthitaa praarthitaa. 'I took birth in the Yaduvansha – the lineage of Yadu that purifies everybody, because of Brahma's prayer, to protect all the beings on earth.'

'We accept that You took an Avatar because of Brahmaji's prayer, but You were not born in the purifying Yaduvansha. *Sakha ude`yivaan.*' The word '*sakha*' used here, also means *sakhaa* – friend. And, in Sanskrit, if 'sa' and 'kha' are separated, 'kha' means the sky, and 'sa' means '*vaah*' – an exclamation of appreciation. Hence, *sakhaude`yivaan* is interpreted by the gopis to argue that Shri Krishna was not born in the Yaduvansha; He manifested in the sky – *khe` ude`yivaan.*

'Why do you refuse to accept that I was born in the Yaduvansha?'

'Because nobody as great as You has ever been born in the lineage of Yadu. You don't even have compassion for those You have accepted and summoned, and who weep so piteously now! But, we accept that You took birth because of Brahma's prayer.'

'Why do you accept this, then?'

In Vishwanath Chakravarty's commentary, the gopis say, 'We accept that You took birth because of Brahma's prayer, but do You know the purpose of his prayer?'

'What was the purpose?'

'Brahmaji creates the world, and wants to increase its population. He ordered all his sons to help increase the world's population. He saw that the Saints and bhaktas started living in Vraja, and were trying, through sadhan-bhajan (efforts for spiritual progress; singing Bhagwan's praises) to escape from their worldly bonds. He saw that they were also giving sermons and persuading other people to walk on the path of mukti (Moksha; liberation from rebirth). Brahmaji got worried that his plans of increasing the world would not succeed if so many people became liberated.'

'So, what happened then?'

'Brahmaji asked You to manifest on earth, Kanhaiya. Until You took birth here, in Vraja, people would meditate with great concentration. They would do bhajan and sadhana. But ever since You came, they have given up their *maalaa* (rosary), reciting religious passages, and meditation. The Saints have stopped giving sermons. They run to listen to Your flute. Brahma was happy that his purpose was achieved. He became confident that his creation would flourish.'

This is why You have come, because of Brahma's prayer, to increase the world. You have not come to give Moksha.' This is what Vishwanath Chakravarty has imagined. Bhagwan Shri Krishna was surprised to hear this interpretation, and such feelings. The natural twists and turns of prema are being revealed. These are very dear to Bhagwan.

The gopis say, 'Shyam Sunder, Your hand is like a lotus flower – *virachitaabhayam vrishnidhoorya te` charanameeyushaam sansrate`rbhayaat, karasaroruhum kaanta kaamadam shirasi dhe`hi nah shreekaraagraham.* You give *abhaya daan* (the gift of

becoming fearless) to Your bhaktas with this hand. You accepted Shree (Laxmiji) with this lotus-like hand of Yours. This hand of Yours even fulfills the *kaamanaa* (desires) of Your bhaktas, if they have any desires. If they have no desires, they become free of the tendency to have desires. Your hand has the power to grant both these. So, please Grace us. Place Your *hasta kamal* (lotus-like hand) on our heads. Have mercy, Shyam Sunder!

There was a time when we would get peace during Your absence by talking about Your leelas. We would get Your darshan (see with reverence) early morning, when You set off to graze the cows; then again in the evening, when You returned. Do You know how we passed the time in-between? We would while away the hours by talking about Your leelas. We spoke about the way You stole butter one day, broke the pot of butter on another day, or the day You teased some gopi. The hours of separation were beguiled by remembering Your delightful leelas.'

Maharajji would say, 'People say that they are unable to do *dhyaana* (meditation). Look; I will narrate a small leela. Meditate on that. It is a leela from the Bhagwat. One day, Yashoda Maiya placed the pots of butter high up, on a net holder, so that Kanhaiya would not be able to reach it. She wanted to break His habit of stealing butter. However, Kanhaiya is Kanhaiya, after all! He went into the room where the butter was kept, and saw the pots hanging well beyond His reach. He opened the back door. A calf was sitting in the backyard. Great Saints had become creepers and calves in Vrindavan. The calf saw that Kanhaiya needed assistance, so he came inside at once, and stood under the pots of butter. Kanhaiya clambered onto his back and stood up. He was now able to reach the pots. With one hand, He held on to a pot, and with His other hand He began to eat the butter. The calf was full of love. He was a Saint who had become a calf to participate in Bhagwan's leela. His love for Kanhaiya was that of a *sakhaa* (friend). Friends always play jokes on each other.

The calf deliberately moved a step or two away. Kanhaiya was left hanging in the air, holding on to the pot of butter with one hand. 'Maiya! Maiya!' He called. Now, have a darshan of this scene. This three year old, blue-hued boy hanging in midair, holding on to a pot of butter, and calling His mother to help Him down! Your mind will cling to this leela. Meditation will be effortless.

The gopis tell Shri Krishna, 'Kanhaiya, earlier, we would pass the time supported by the memories of Your childhood leelas. Shyam Sunder, Your *kathaa* (talks about Bhagwan) seemed like *amrita* (elixir that gives immortality).

Tava kathaamritam taptajeevanam kavibhireeditam kalmashaapaham, shravanamangalam shreemadaatatam bhuvighrinantite` bhooridaa janaah.

Your katha seemed like life-giving amrita at one time. But now, after the Laghu Raas, and being accepted by You, those memories fail to comfort us. The same kathas now sharpen our anguish. Our yearning for You is intensified by those memories. What are we to do? Today, we have no support of any kind.'

Tava kathaamritam can be broken up in two ways – *tava kathaamritam*, or *tava kathaamritam*. (Mritam means death.) 'Your katha is as painful as death. We begin to thrash in agony because it intensifies our longing for You.'

Kanhaiya says, 'My dear, great Mahatmas have said that My katha gives deep joy. *Kavibhireeditam* – it sends away the serpents of *paapa* (sin).'

The gopis reply, ‘This is what the Saints say, isn’t it? This is not what the common people say. Only Your bhaktas say this, and it is natural that they say this.’

‘Why?’

‘You keep Your bhaktas so comfortable and well-fed that they are bound to speak in Your favor. They will not speak the truth. They praise Your katha because they are Your agents!’

Pujya Ramkinkarji Maharaj would say this at times. Just two days back, a respected I.G. told me, ‘My friend, I am a lawyer of the Government. I have to speak in favor of the Government.’ Thakurji lavishes so much Grace on Saints and Mahatmas that they will always speak in His favor. They can never say anything that goes against Bhagwan. When someone becomes partisan, we can’t expect him to adhere to the truth.

Kavibhireeditam is what the Saints say, but what do common people say? The gopis say, ‘We don’t think that there is rasa in your katha. If Your katha had rasa, why would it give us pain? If Your katha had rasa, Your memory and Your name would not intensify our suffering. If the Saints say that Your katha has rasa, well – it is natural that they would speak in Your favor!’

Our Shri Maharajji would also joke about this. He would say that the Saints and Mahatmas are very clever; they never make a losing deal. If asked to explain, he would say, ‘It is you who run the factory and business, but to whom do you offer food first? You offer food to the Saints first. When you get a new car, who do you ask to sit in it first? You invite a Mahatma. When you build a new house, and have the ritual of *griha prave`sha* (going to live in a new house), who is asked to be the first to enter? It is a Saint. You earn the money, and we get the honor! That is because we are on the side of Narayana, while you are on the side of Laxmiji. Now, you decide who has the advantage!’ The feeling is that Narayana favors those who are on His side.

Pujya Rotiram Baba would joke about this, too. ‘Thakurji has organized everything so well for Sadhus like us! We do no work; we just give an hour’s talk in the evening. That is just like chatting; and everything is arranged for us by Thakurji. What would He be doing for those who do his bhajan continuously?’

What does this imply? *Kavibhireeditam*. The Saints favor Bhagwan because He does everything for them. So, being on His side brings the greatest benefits. When we are on the side of Narayana, we get Narayana. And – at whose feet does Laxmiji to be found? She is found at the feet of Narayana. Laxmiji is called ‘*chanchalaa*’ (fickle). If you want her to remain with you, you must remain at Narayana’s feet, because that is where she always stays. She never stays anywhere else for long. This is why those who have taken refuge in Narayana are very intelligent.

What else do the gopis say? *Shravanamangalam* – we get good fortune by just listening to Bhagwan’s katha. The gopis say, ‘This is true, but only up to a point. The straightforward meaning is that we feel happy when we hear Your katha.’ However, the gopis give a different interpretation. They say, ‘Our family life gets ruined as soon as we hear Your katha. Just hearing Your name maddens us.’

Our Maharajji would narrate this story to us. A *fakkad* (carefree) Mahatma sat at the border of Vrindavan, wearing nothing but a loin cloth. He would sit at the point of

entry into Vrindavan, on the main road, and warn the people going there. ‘Make any mistake in life, but don’t make the mistake of going to Vrindavan!’ he’d say. ‘Incase you get into the company of people who take you there, be careful not to venture anywhere near the banks of the Jamunaji.’

The next lines are extraordinary! They display his love through negation. He actually uses the word ‘misfortune’! He says, ‘If your misfortune takes you to the bank of Jamunaji, remember that a dark, handsome youth moves around there. If you get a glimpse of Him, be careful, and run away at once. Don’t allow your eyes to meet His – or else, your condition will become like mine! My condition is that I have become estranged from my family, from the world, and all worldly interaction.’

So, *shravane`na e`vam magalam*. The gopis say, ‘It is said that hearing Bhagwan’s name and katha brings good fortune. However, our present condition is such that we feel that our misfortune started the day we first heard Your name!’ It takes a little time for misfortune to reach its peak, doesn’t it? Yes! If you want to be safe and lead an orderly life, don’t hear Bhagwan’s name!

Kanhaiya asked the gopis, ‘What commentary are you giving, gopis? See how many great kathas are organized!’ Even here, there are those present who have been organizing kathas in this garden over the years. Great Mahatmas like our Pujya Gurudev and Pujya Pundit Ramkinkarji have given discourses here over the years. ‘Gopis, you say that people should not listen to My katha?’

The gopis reiterate their stand. ‘These worldly people are on Your side, just like the preachers. They are in a conspiracy with You.’

‘How is that?’

‘The organizers of Your katha give the preachers every possible comfort and facility, so they speak in Your favor, and You give Laxmi (wealth) to the organizers.’ This is exactly what is written in the Bhagwat. *Shreemadaatatam*. Bhagwan gives prosperity to those who organize His kathas. ‘The three of you have formed a group, and you suppress the world. That is why we say *shreemadaatatam*. It is the rich people who have Laxmi and they are the ones who organize Your kathas.’

‘Why do they do this?’

‘Because You give them Laxmi. You make them wealthy. Laxmiji is Your servant. She is also in Your gang, like Your bhaktas. These three entrap people in a maze. Pardon us, Kanhaiya, but it is far better to remain far away from Your katha!’

Shreemadaatatam bhuvi ghrinantite` bhooridaa janaah. The word *bhooridaa* has two meanings. The straight meaning is that the person who gives Bhagwan’s katha is the greatest *daani* (philanthropist) in the world. If the speaker and the listener are both attached to Bhagwan, His very *naama* (name) is enough for the *naami* (the one whose name it is) to manifest. Thakurji manifests through the medium of words. So – the one who gives us Thakurji’s name is the world’s biggest giver of alms. Hence, the straightforward meaning is that the people who give the katha are the greatest donors.

The gopis, however, give a different interpretation. ‘The people who do Your katha are ruining people’s homes and families. They do the greatest harm. So many engineers give up their jobs to become Monks.’ I know that one or two are present here, who want to take the vows of renunciation. They are being dissuaded from

doing so. Our Maharajji would joke that this katha has induced many doctors, professors, and industrialists to give up their homes.

Who was Lala Babu? He was an industrialist from Bengal, who came away to Vrindavan. Every morning he would wake up and think, 'When will the day come, when Kanhaiya summons me? I will go to Vrindavan, eating begged food from the Vrajavasis. I will chant 'Radhekrishna, Radhekrishna' as I wander in the lanes of Vrindavan. When will the day dawn, when I get a darshan of the Yugal Sarkar (the dual Lords, Shri Radha-Krishna) every day?' This was Lala Babu's daily meditation. Do you know how Lala Babu ultimately left home? He was a wealthy land owner, and he had great faith in Bhagwan. One day, he became so engrossed in meditation that he lost track of time. His servant came timidly, to tell him that he was an hour late for his bath. 'Babu (Sir), it is getting late.' Lala Babu felt that it was Banke Behari who was speaking. Yes! He heard Thakurji's voice instead of the servant's. He left his house that very instant.

When Lala Babu reached Vrindavan, he had a temple built with his share of wealth. He did not take anyone else's share, nor did he collect funds from others. The temple is there, even today, in between the temples of Ranganathji and Godavihari.

Lala Babu had the *praana pratishtha* (the ceremony of invoking the Lord's spirit into the image) done. His bhakti and discrimination were amazing. 'The prana pratishtha is done,' he thought, 'but how can we know that Thakurji has come into His form?' It was the month of Magh; winter had set in. Lala Babu was about to offer *maakhan-misri* (butter and sugar) as *baal bhoga* (breakfast). Thakurji is a small child. He has breakfast before He has a bath and the *shringaara* (dressing up) is done after that. Before His shringara is done, He is bare headed.

Perhaps it was Bhagwan, Himself, who prompted Lala Babu. 'Let me put a blob of butter on Thakurji's head and see,' he thought. 'When a person is alive, his body is warm. If Thakurji has actually come into the image, the butter will melt.' There are so many kinds of bhaktas! This happened in recent times – it is not a story about the Satya or Treta Yugas.

And, this is exactly what happened! The offering was made, and Lala Babu placed a blob of butter on Thakurji's bare head. He watched it intently. After a minute or so, the butter began to melt. Tears flowed from Lala Babu's eyes. He prostrated at Thakurji's feet. 'You test everybody; today I tested You, and You accepted the test! What amazing Grace!' What is the purpose of telling you this story? It is an example of how Thakurji prompted many great people to give up their homes.

So, the gopis say, 'Kanhaiya, Your katha makes us give up lots of things. What can we do? Today, we get no comfort from even Your katha! *Pranatakaamadama padmajaarchitama dharanimandanama dhya'yamaapadi* – we have heard that whoever takes refuge in Your *charan* (feet) with love has all his wishes fulfilled. We are at Your feet; we take refuge in You. *Padmajaa* (by Laxmi) *architama* (worshipped). We are at the same feet that Laxmi worships.'

'What do you want, gopis?'

'Please place these feet of Yours on our head. Place them on our chest. Remove our agony of viraha, Kanhaiya! We pray to You to do this. It is so long since we saw You. Aren't You aware of our condition?'

The gopis are describing their condition before the Maha Raas. ‘*Kutilakuntalam shreemukhamchate` jada udeekshataam pakshmakrid drishaam*. When You go to graze the cows, and come back at dusk, Your curly locks hang over Your face. You are covered with the dust of the cows’ hooves. Your divine face is very appealing. We used to get Your darshan every evening, and the day’s viraha would be wiped away. However, even at that time, we were troubled by one thing.’

See the prema of the gopis. It is extraordinary! What did they feel? ‘At that time, Kanhaiya, the blinking of our eyes would obstruct Your darshan. We felt that Brahma is a great fool to have created eyes that blinked involuntarily. He does not know what we suffer each time Your vision is obstructed for us. Had Brahma been aware of this, he would have made eyelids that we could open and shut at will.’ The gopis are accusing Brahmaji of lacking intelligence!

What is their indication? They are pointing out their pain at not seeing Prabhu for so many hours, after the Maha Raas. The anguish of His vision being blocked for a split second emphasizes their present suffering. ‘Even then we suffered so much; think of what we suffer now! Please be compassionate, Kanhaiya, and give us the darshan of Your gracious face. We cannot bear this pain any more. We can no longer bear to be parted from You. You have brought us to this state. Your swaying gait, Your lovely face, the slight smile on Your lips, Your loving words – all Your actions have brought us to this state. Kanhaiya, we are unable to change our lives. Please have Grace. Reveal Yourself!’

Note this last shloka of the Gopi Geet. See where the gopis’ mind goes.

‘*Yatte` sujaatacharanaamburuham stane`shu bheetaah shanaih priyadadheemahi karkashe`shoo,*

te`naataveematasi tad vyathate` na kinsvit koorpaadibhirbhramati bhavadaayushaam nah.’

Shukadevji Maharaj says that this is what the gopis said. They were unable to complete the last shloka. Nobody knows what else the gopis wanted to say. The Gopi Geet is the outpouring of the gopis’ heart. Not even Shukadevji knows if they wanted to say something more.

However, the gopis express another feeling. ‘Kanhaiya, Your feet are so tender that we feel afraid to place them on our chest, lest it hurts You. When we think of Your wandering barefoot in the forest at night, we feel afraid that some thorn may prick Your tender feet. The very thought pierces our heart, Kanhaiya. We cannot bear the thought of Your pain.’

This is the last sentence of the Gopi Geet. The gopis lose consciousness when they think of Shri Krishna’s discomfort. Their own suffering does not make them lose consciousness, but the thought that Kanhaiya may suffer is more than they can bear.

The gopis’ losing consciousness is the point where their sadhana meets Bhagwan’s kripa. This is the *poornataa* (fulfillment; successful conclusion) of the gopis’ efforts to attain Bhagwan, and this is where Bhagwan’s Grace takes over. The gopis play-acted His leelas. They asked bhaktas where to find Him. They joined Kishoriji and searched for Him, but this was not enough. Ultimately, they prayed heartbreakingly, but even that failed. When they lost all capacity for further effort, it was time for Bhagwan to manifest.

Our Maharajji told us that he had done many *anushthaana* (specific rituals) of the Gayatri Mantra and also the Krishna Mantra given by his Guru. He said that he did not even get a dream of Bhagwan, let alone His darshan! One day, he went to the Gangaji for his bath, leaving his mala on the bank. Because of the rituals Maharajji had done, the fragrance of ghee (rarified butter) clung to the mala. A crow swooped down and picked up the mala. Then he flew off, dropping the mala into the Gangaji. You can consider it to be Bhagwan's leela. Maharajji felt utterly hopeless. All his efforts had failed, and now he had even lost his mala.

Maharajji returned to his house. At that time, he was still in the Grihastha Ashram (the status of a married householder). He told us that he shut himself up in a little windowless room and wept with frustration. He has written in a book, 'I was sitting in the room, weeping with frustration. I remember that I was awake. I was sitting on the floor. My feeling of hopelessness has reached an unbearable pitch. I felt certain that I would not obtain Bhagwan in this life, because I had made every possible effort, and failed. Even my mala had been dropped into the Gangaji. I felt that no achievement was possible for me in this lifetime. The tears flowed from my eyes.

All of a sudden, the room was filled with radiance; a divine effulgence. I noticed that the door was shut and there was no window from which light could enter the room. I rubbed my eyes repeatedly, but the room remained bright. After about two minutes, a boy manifested. He seemed to be about ten or eleven years old. He wasn't dark; His complexion was fair. He kept dancing from one side of the room to another, on the floor, smiling at me. I tried to get up and prostrate before Him, but my limbs would not obey my will. He continued to dance for a while, and then gave me a short sermon. "You are what I am; and I am what you are. After today, never let anything trouble you." That was all! That was the darshan I had of Bhagwan. The same form is established at our Ashram, as Nritya Gopal.'

So, good people, we can call it the completion of sadhana, or the hopeless condition in sadhana – but, that is where Prabhu reveals Himself. Please note that this leela of the Maha Raas is not a leela of song and dance; it is a divine sadhana. It is a leela of Bhagwan's divine rasa. If seen from this angle, where can we find such a methodical description of the progress in sadhana? The gopis' lives contain Dharma nishtha. Their prema for Shri Krishna is *poorna* (total). Their lives show us how they obtained Bhagwan and the obstacles they faced. All this is described in the Maha Raas. The gopis fainted at the thought of Bhagwan's pain. He had not manifested yet. Shukadevji Maharaj begins talking now. '*Iti gopyah pragaayantyah pralapantyashcha chitradhaah, ruruduh susvaran raajan krishnadarshanalaalasaah.*'

'Rajan!' Shukadevji is alerting Raja Parikshit. When the speaker wants to say something important, he draws the attention of the listener. Shukadevji says, '*Krishnadarshanalaalasaah.*' People say, 'We can't obtain Bhagwan.' Do they have a *laalasaah* – a longing – for Bhagwan? They ask, 'Maharaj, what is *laalasaah*? What is its essence?' Shukadevji tells us that there is no need to give a description. The gopis are living examples of *laalasaah* for the darshan of Shri Krishna – Krishna-darshan-laalasaah. If you want to know the essence of the longing for Krishna-darshan, see the gopis. Bhagwan is obtained in such intense longing.

Now, please examine your own hearts and lives. Every day we quarrel with Bhagwan, blaming Him for not coming even though we did so many malas. We meditate, but nothing happens. Just see the condition of the gopis! People do not hesitate to pass comments on the gopis; they criticize the gopis and Shri Krishna. The state of the gopis was so much more elevated than ours. It is like the difference between the earth and the sky. Shri Shukadevji is deeply happy to see the pristine prema of the gopis. He praises them again and again. ‘Raja Parikshit, if you want to see the highest form of pure love for Prabhu, see its personification in the form of the gopis. They are Krishna-darshan-laalasaa incarnate.’

Then, when the longing appeared in its totality,

*‘Taasaamaavirabhoota shaureeh smayamaanamukhaambujah,
peetaambaradharah sragvee saakshaanmanmathamanmathah.’*

The one who agitates the *mana* (mind) is called ‘*manmatha*’. He is Kamdev, the presiding deity of lust. The one who churns even the mind of *manmatha* is called *manmathamanmathah*, and He is Shyam Sunder. That means, even Kamadev watches in amazement. He has never seen such beauty and such pristine prema. ‘I am far, far beneath this level of love,’ he thinks. *Saakshaat manmathamanmathah*. This is the tangible form that stirs even Kamadev’s mind. Shri Krishna’s exquisite form is the color of blue sapphires. He has tied a *peetaambara* (yellow stole) round His waist. A slight smile hovers on His lips. He is supremely attractive. He manifests in the middle of the unconscious gopis.

Shri Shukadevji said something very beautiful. ‘*Smayamaanamukhaambuja*. Shri Krishna was smiling when He manifested.’ This seems a little strange. How can anyone smile when his loved ones are close to death? This is not a sign of love or friendship!

Why was Shri Krishna smiling? Jeeva Goswami says, ‘Only a *pre`mi* (one who loves) can understand this. Prabhu was watching the gopis and listening to the Gopi Geet. In the last verse, He heard about their apprehension of His pain, and saw that they fainted at the thought. Bhagwan thought, ‘The gopis have already fainted. If I show Myself in tears, their sorrow will increase. They may be harmed. They may even die! The thought of My pain is unbearable for them.’ That is why Bhagwan smiled outwardly, even though He suffered inwardly.

Why?

‘If the gopis see Me smiling, they will feel happy, because I am their joy and I am their sorrow. They are happy in My happiness and they suffer when I suffer.’ That is why Shri Krishna appeared with a smile on His face. And, *peetaambaradharah* can be interpreted in two ways. It can mean, ‘the one who wears a yellow stole’, or it can mean ‘the one who holds a yellow stole in a particular way’. What can this particular way be? Jeeva Goswami says that Shri Krishna was wearing a *pitambara*, and had tied both hands with one edge of His stole. His hands were tied like the hands of a criminal. This is how Rasa Behari Bhagwan manifested.

And, as soon as Bhagwan manifested, the gopis regained their consciousness. It was as though life came back into their bodies. They stood up. Some caught His hands, and some caught His feet. Some held Him by the waist, and some held on to His

shoulders. None of them asked Him anything – they just caught hold of Him to make sure that He did not disappear again.

Now, let us allow them to remain standing for some time. In the next two days, you will hear about the questions they asked, and the Raas that took place.

(Discourse of the seventh day)

Good people, let us take our minds once again to that supremely divine leela of Bhagwan. If we can indeed enter into that leela, we need never come out of it again. You may have heard our Maharajji say that this is exactly what is described.

One day, a gopi was meditating, sitting on the sandy bank of the Jamunaji. Devarshi Narad was passing by. ‘Oh, gopi, are you meditating on Shri Krishna?’ he asked. ‘The gopi opened her eyes. ‘It is true that I am meditating on Shri Krishna,’ she replied, ‘but for a different purpose. Previously, I would do *dhyaana* (meditation) to bring Him into my heart. Now I am meditating to remove Him from my mind. Kanhaiya now refuses to leave my heart, no matter how hard I try.

A dilemma has come into my life. When I get up in the morning and start cleaning the house, I feel that Kanhaiya has come, and has caught the broom in my hand. I just keep sitting there. A little later, it seems that there was no Kanhaiya – it was my mind that was playing tricks on me.

When I go to milk the cows, I hear Kanhaiya’s voice telling me to direct the stream of milk into His mouth. I start doing this. A little later, I see that there is no Kanhaiya; the milk lies in a pool on the ground. I get scolded at home! This is why I am sitting here and meditating to get Kanhaiya out of my mind, to become normal again.’

Yashyasfoorti lavaaya hanta yogee samuktakanthate` mugdhe`yama bataparaateesa hridayaan niskraantimaakaankshati`.

This is written in the Bhagwat – it is not something I have imagined. Saints have written commentaries on this. Great Yogis yearn for a moment’s darshan of the same Shri Krishna, and this simple gopi wants to remove Him from her mind! She is meditating for the purpose of removing Shri Krishna from her heart, while great Saints try their utmost to establish Him in their hearts. Hers is also a mind, and ours is also a mind, but what a difference between the two minds! Our problem is that Bhagwan doesn’t come into our heart, and we can’t meditate. The gopi’s problem is that Bhagwan won’t leave her heart!

Yes! This is a divine rasa. A Saint of Vraja said something very important. He said that we have to understand that this rasa cannot be obtained through words. We cannot experience this rasa until we come close to the basic level at which a person becomes eligible for this experience. He has written a sentence, ‘*Bhagavata rasika rasika kee baatein rasika binu koyoo samajhee sake` naa.*’ (Nobody can understand the substance of the rasa of Bhagwan unless he is a premi.) We cannot reach this rasa, we cannot immerse ourselves in it, and we cannot savor it so easily. We can understand it intellectually, but it is difficult for us to experience this rasa.

Let us go back to that episode of Bhagwan’s divine leela. Bhagwan Shyam Sunder sees the gopis in a state of intense viraha. This is where they come to the end of their sadhana, and this is where Bhagwan’s kripa manifests. Bhagwan Raas Behari *taasaamaavirabhootashchaurih smayamaanamukhaambujah peetaambaradharah sragvee saakshaanmanmathah manmathah. Tam vilokyaagatampre`shtham preetyufulladrishobalaah, uttasyugapat sarvaanstanmyah praanamivaagatam.*

Commentators say that *taasaamaavirabhoota* (He appeared in their midst) indicates that He was already present among the gopis, when He revealed Himself. This confirms what was said earlier, that Shri Krishna had covered Himself with the odhni of a gopi. Jeev Goswamiji Maharaj says that had Shri Krishna gone anywhere, the gopis would have seen Him coming from the dense forest. But it was not so. Shri Krishna showed Himself in the midst of the gopis who had fainted while singing the Gopi Geet.

This is why the bhaktas say that Bhagwan was hidden there, and He manifested; while philosophers say that Bhagwan can manifest wherever He wants, and disappear whenever He wants. The lives of the gopis are indeed laudable. It was as though life returned to their lifeless bodies. All of them *preetyutfulladrishobalaah – abalaa* (a woman, who has no strength) is the word Shukadevji has used. Why? Because the gopis had reached a stage where they had no strength left. They had become incapable of any sadhana, thought, or ability to imitate Bhagwan's leelas. They did not even have the strength to call out to Him. Hence, 'abalaa' is appropriate. In the principle of *shakti* (strength, or power), it is sung, '*Sune`ree maine` nirabala ke` bala raama* (I have heard that Rama is the strength of the weak).'

As soon as a person stops depending upon his own strength – whether it is Draupadi, Gajendra, or the gopis – there can be no delay. There is no possibility of delay. Why? If someone has to come from some other place, there is a chance of some delay. Bhagwan is present everywhere; He just has to manifest wherever He wants. The situation here is that the gopis were unconscious when Bhagwan manifested. How did they know that He had appeared? They had sung Gopi Geet, and had fainted while singing it; and Bhagwan manifested after they became unconscious.

Jeev Goswami says that the gopis would have died, had their anguish increased. Loss of consciousness is followed by death. So, then, who had kept them alive after they fainted? Goswamiji says that Shyam Sunder appeared before their mind when they were unconscious, to prevent them from moving towards death. So, they experienced the bliss of union with Prabhu while still unconscious. Externally, they experienced viyog (separation) and internally, they experienced sanyog (union). This gave them a spurt of energy, enabling them to open their eyes. They saw the same He, who they had seen inside, was standing outside, too. He, who met the gopis inside as a feeling, protected their prana. Because of this, the gopis obtained Prabhu's darshan and union while they were still unconscious. So, when they opened their eyes – *preetutfulladrishobalaah* – they were totally captivated by Shri Krishna.

What happened then? It seems as though the gopis obtained great strength. Their own strength vanished, and Shri Krishna's strength came into them. They recovered completely. They stood up. One gopi got up first of all, and caught Shri Krishna's hand tightly. Just see their simple-heartedness! They think that Shri Krishna won't be able to run away if they hold Him tight! Even now, they don't know that nobody can hold Him against His will!

'*Kachit karaambujam shaure`rjagrahe`dajjulinaa mudaa*' – every word used here is carefully selected by Shukadevji. Whose hand have the gopis caught? They have caught the hand of He, who is very brave. He will defeat everyone in future. The gopis caught His hand and stood, as though they'd never let go. On one side is their

simple heart, and on the other side is their fear of viyog. They are afraid that He may vanish again. The gopis are not angry – they are very happy. They stand, clinging to Shri Krishna. Viyog had brought *aishvarya* (grandeur) to the forefront; sanyog brought *maadhurya* (sweetness) into their hearts. Just a while ago, they were saying, ‘You are the Master of the world. You are the antaryaami. You can do everything.’ Where did that magnificence go now? Now, they don’t see Bhagwan; they see their Kanhaiya. They see the beloved son of Nanda, who is their very life!

The gopis no longer feel awe or constraint. One caught Shri Krishna’s hand, and another raised her hand and caught His shoulder, to make sure He didn’t run away. The words given here are such that they seem trite, from the worldly viewpoint. However, if a person is Graced by Kishoriji or Shri Krishna, they can uplift him to a sublime bliss.

What did the third gopi do? She said, ‘*Kaachidajjalinaagrihaattanvee taamboolacharvitam.*’ The sweetness of romance deepens and hides Shri Krishna’s glory. The gopis had, at the time of the Laghu Raas, offered *taamboola* (a beetle nut leaf stuffed with spices) to Shri Krishna. The third gopi asked for the taamboola He was chewing! This shows how simple their love is. *Taamboola charvitam* – she wants the half chewed taamboola! These are words given in the main text. Thousands of gopis are there, with Shri Krishna. Shukadevji has described only a few of the main ones. Were he to describe them all, the night of Sharad Purnima would pass; when would the Raas take place?

‘*E`kaa bhrukutimaabadhya*’ – one gopi stood aloof, with her eyebrows raised in hauteur. She caught neither Bhagwan’s hand, nor His shoulder. She did not ask for taamboola; she made no effort to touch Him. She just stood apart, looking at Shri Krishna. ‘Such *vairaagya* (detachment)! I didn’t know that you are so detached.’ Shri Shukadevji’s body thrills at this gopi’s total prema.

Who is this gopi, who is so stand-offish? Shri Shukadevji looks carefully, and sees that it is none other than Radha Rani! This is a mock quarrel between lovers! Who else could look angrily at Thakurji? Parashuramji had also frowned at Bhagwan Shri Rama. The people present had felt terrified and tried to run away. All of you know that episode.

Here, Shukadevji has added the word ‘prema’ to the description of frowning – *pre`ma samrambhavivhalaa*. An ocean of love ripples in Kishoriji’s frown! Only someone who has deep love for Prabhu can understand a lovers’ quarrel. Not everything can be conveyed by words! The text says that this gopi – Kishoriji – has caught her lower lip between her teeth, and is looking askance at Shri Krishna. Just a while ago she was weeping for Him. She had fainted at the thought of His pain; and now she does not even come close! She says nothing; just looks at Him showing haughtiness. This is a leela that enhances their prema. It is deriving the joy of both sanyog and viyog!

Devarshi Narad has described prema as *pratikshanam vardhamaanam* (it increases by the minute). Prema has no limits. There are so many ways by which it swells. Shri Krishna will now have to think of how to cajole Shri Radha Rani, since she does not approach Him.

Another gopi is mentioned, but not named. Commentators have written that she must have been a great Yogi in her past life. She must have come into contact with a Krishna bhakta, and wished she could become a gopi. That is why she was reborn as a gopi.

What was this gopi doing? She saw Shri Krishna manifest, with half shut eyes. Immediately, she sat in an *aasana* (Yogic posture) and immersed herself in meditation. Oh, does anyone sit in meditation when Thakurji is before them? If she wanted to meditate, she should have done so when He had vanished. Now, she sits with her eyes closed, when Kanhaiya stands before her. He is looking at her, but she is not looking at Him! Shukadevji says that the practice of the past remained with her.

Yes, but why is she doing Yoga now that she has Krishna prema? She should meet Him now, and do Raas with Him. She should be indulging in romantic chit-chat with Him. Why is she doing Yoga?

The fact is that she is scared.

What is she scared of?

She is scared that Kanhaiya may disappear again. She doesn't trust Him to stay with her. And, the form in which He has manifested – *manmathamanmathah* – is one that puts even Kamadev to shame. 'My attractiveness is world famous, but it is put to shame beside Shri Krishna's appeal,' he thinks. The gopi brought Shri Krishna's beauty into her heart by the route of the eyes, and established Him there. She felt that the Krishna who was outside may leave her, but the inner Krishna would always be with her. So, it was better to keep Krishna in her heart.

The same thing had happened at the *pushpa vaatikaa* (garden) when Shri Kishoriji (as Sitaji) saw Shri Rama. She was with her companions, and felt shy, so she brought Prabhu into her heart by the route of her eyes. Goswami Tulsidasji has written, '*Deeniha palaka kapaata sayaaanee.*'

Shri Krishna delights in seeing the different reactions of His premis. A number of gopis cling to Him lovingly, one gopi looks askance at Him, and one sits like a Yogini. Shri Krishna savors this rasa. The Paramatma is *rasa svaroopaa* – He is the essence of sweet emotion. So, when the *rasa svaroopaa* Paramatma wants to be *raasa svaroopaa* (the essence of Raas), only then will a bhakta experience these leelas. A variety of rasas are included – displeasure, prema, *se`vaa* (service), *sakhya* (camaraderie), *vaatsalya* (maternal love), *daasya* (the devoted love of a servant), and *maadhurya* (romance). Raas is a combination of all the rasas – *rasaanaamasamoohaah*.

Bhagwan Shri Krishna feels deep joy as He watches the gopis. When they do nothing, He feels that He should do something. 'O gopis,' He says, 'Why are you wasting time? We have done the Raas leela once. The night has not ended yet. Don't you want to do the Raas leela again?' As soon as the gopis heard the name of Raas leela, their hearts started dancing. They got up at once, eager to do Raas.

In the Gopi Geet, the gopis sang, 'Your smile is enough to shatter our pride.' All their vanity and pride disappears as soon as Shri Krishna gives them a smiling glance. Shri Krishna asked, 'Will you just sit in meditation? Will you just look askance at Me? Don't you want to do Raas?' He only asked, and all their pride

disappeared. The meditation vanished and the haughty look vanished. All the gopis got up and surrounded Kanhaiya. Kishoriji and Shyam Sunder are in the center, surrounded by thousands of gopis. The main text says, '*vanitaa shyayoothapah*'. They all followed Shri Krishna. Where did they go?

They reached the bank of the Kalindi, where a beautiful flat space had been prepared. How had it been prepared? The ripples of the Kalindi are her hands. Kalindi had made the riverside sand flat and smooth for the Maha Raas, using the ripples of the water.

And, who arranged the lighting? It was Chandrama (the moon). The Chandrama is Bhagwan Shri Krishna's brother-in-law. (Laxmiji and Chandrama both emerged from the ocean, so the moon is Laxmiji's brother. Laxmiji married Shri Krishna, so the moon became Shri Krishna's brother-in-law.) 'Oh, my brother-in-law is about to do something great. I should render assistance,' thought Chandrama. It was a full moon. It was the night of Sharad Purnima. And, when the moonlight fell on the sand, the bank of the Jamunaji gleamed as though it was a stage made of silver.

Fragrant flowers bloomed on all the shrubs and creepers. A cool breeze touched the Jamunaji, and touched the flowers, as though Prakriti Devi (the goddess Nature) was rendering service to Prabhu, assisting Him in the Raas leela. Prakriti Devi, Bhu Devi, and Kalindi are all serving Bhagwan.

Why?

Kalindi has her own reasons. She wants to be Shri Krishna's Patrani (principal queen) later, so she served Him. Jeev Goswami has written that she feels that Prabhu will notice the sweetness of her nature and accept her willingly later on. She asks for nothing except to serve Him. That is her goal.

And, this is everybody's goal – to obtain Shri Krishna. And, this is exactly what happened. Kalindi is Shri Krishna's fourth Patrani. Later on, there is a description that Kalindi was doing *tapasyaa* (asceticism). Arjuna and Shri Krishna were out hunting. It was Bhagwan's wish to accept Kalindi. He told Arjuna, 'Some lady seems to be doing sadhana there. Go and find out who she is and what she desires.'

Arjuna went to Kalindi and asked, 'Devi, who are you? What do you desire?'

'I am Jamuna,' replied Kalindi. 'I am the daughter of Surya (the sun). I am doing sadhana to get Shri Krishna as my husband.'

Arjuna went back to Shri Krishna and told Him what Kalindi had said. Shri Krishna went to her and said, 'Come with Me. Your sadhana is complete.' He seated her on His chariot and took her to Hastinapur. He told Yudhishtira, 'I am planning My fourth marriage.' Yudhishtira is Dharmaraj (the incarnation of Dharma). He agrees to whatever Bhagwan wants. They came to Dwarka, where Bhagwan's fourth marriage took place.

Shri Krishna is such a Nata Nagar (an actor, a hero)! His essence is love. He married sixteen thousand, one hundred and eight ladies, without a single proposal from any of their families being sent to Him. Yes! Have you seen such love anywhere in this world? Bhagwan Shri Krishna either went to a Svayamvara (where a princess chooses her bridegroom), or He went casually, uninvited.

You may ask, 'What is the proof that Bhagwan Shri Krishna was never sent any proposal by His in-laws?' You may take up the Bhagwat and see for yourselves. Not

a single wedding took place at His in-law's place. Shri Krishna would bring His brides to Dwarka. The wedding ceremonies were conducted according to Vedic rites. Pundits were called, mandaps (decorated areas) were made, and the marriage rituals done properly. Shri Krishna had great love for all His wives. All they had to do was to want Him, as their husband.

Our Maharajji used to say, 'What great sadhana did Rukmini do? An unshakeable resolve to marry nobody except Shri Krishna was all she had. She could not do anything. She could neither go to Him, nor convince her brother to let her marry Him. She could not even say anything to her parents. Her desire for Shri Krishna was genuine. She sent Him a message expressing her feelings.'

And, who arranged everything? It was Shri Krishna. He reached her city with His chariot and Army. He has no objection to being called a thief, for the sake of anyone who loves Him. He abducted Rukmini, and fled. This episode is called 'Rukmini Haran' (the kidnapping of Rukmini) in the Bhagwat. Does anyone receive acclaim for kidnapping someone? Here, however, people say, '*Rukmini harana bhagavaan kee jai!*'

Who can be a premi like Bhagwan? Rukmini is just one example. If you or I have a real, burning desire for Bhagwan, that is all we need. He will do the rest. But our desire must be genuine and intense!

So, we return to Kalindi, who has prepared the stage for the Maha Raas. Bhagwan comes there with all the gopis. You can see the scene in your heart. There are thousands of gopis with whom Bhagwan will do Raas leela. What a vast area it must have been. Shri Krishna had said that they would have a Maha Raas there. However, the path of love is a crooked one. Love always contains sweet disputes.

The gopis said, 'Kanhaiya, we will do the Maha Raas with You, but there is a question we wish to place before You.'

Kanhaiya understood. He knew that no question ever troubled the gopis. How can one come up today? His prema for the gopis is so great; here, too, He enjoyed teasing them.

'Yes,' said Shri Krishna. 'You know that when you place a question to someone, the one you ask is called the Guru. The Guru is first asked to be seated on an *aasana* (a platform or seat) that is higher than yours.' This is just what you have done – given me an asana, while you sit at a lower level, listening to me. So, Shri Krishna said, 'If you want to love Me, or do the Raas leela with Me, the stage is ready. But if you want to ask something, you should arrange for an asana for Me first.' What greater joke could there be? Didn't Shri Krishna know that no arrangements were possible at that hour in the forest, so far from their village? Shri Krishna knew that the gopis were prepared to give up their lives, but they were not prepared to return to Vrindavan. There was no possibility of going there to fetch anything, and they had nothing with them.

Shri Krishna was deliberately teasing the gopis. 'How can you place questions just like that? How can I give any proper answer?' Kabirdasji has said, '*Dhaai akshara pre`ma kaa padhe` so pundita hoye`*'. Only a person who knows the two and a half syllables of the word 'prema' is a Pundit. These uneducated gopis are indeed

fortunate. They have such great love for Bhagwan! They found a solution that would probably have never occurred to learned people.

‘Yes, Prabhu! What You say is proper. We should offer You an asana before placing our question. We are making arrangements.’ Bhagwan smiles and watched from the corner of His eyes. What arrangements can they make here? They can’t even go to Vrindavan to bring anything.

Shri Kishoriji showed the way. Lalita, Vishakha, Chandravali, Shyama, and the other gopis began to spread out their dupattas (the garment draped round the head) on the ground. A thousand dupattas were laid, one over the other, and a platform was created for Shri Krishna to sit on. It was a thousand colored asana!

No human being can create such an asana! If a thousand chunarees (dupattas) were used, it became an asana that had a thousand colors. It was a beautiful platform. Kishoriji signaled smilingly, to indicate, ‘The asana is ready. Please take your seat.’ In a quarrel between a bhakta and Bhagwan, it is always Bhagwan who is the loser. The bhakta always wins.

Bhagwan thought, ‘I had not expected the gopis to be so resourceful. I had thought that there would be no scope of questions, if there was no asana.’ Bhagwan knew that the gopis had no questions to place; they wanted to make an accusation. The gopis smiled when Kishoriji invited Bhagwan to take His seat.

Shukadevji’s body thrills, as Bhagwan moves towards the asana made for Him. Tears flow from his eyes. ‘Rajan,’ he tells Parikshit, ‘Listen carefully! Do you realize that this is Bhagwan? He does not readily sit on the lotus of the Yogis’ heart! Great Saints do sadhana. They meditate, as instructed by their Gurus, but it is not easy for them to get Bhagwan to sit on the lotus of their heart. Do you realize what asana He is about to sit on?’

‘Yes, Maharaj. It is the asana of the gopis’ chunarees.’

‘Yes, they are chunarees; but do you know what they are like?’

‘Please tell me, Maharaj.’

‘The gopis had wept when Prabhu disappeared. They were also sweating. They had wiped their sweat and their tears with these dupattas. The kajal in their eyes and the vermilion they had used were smeared on the fabric of their dupattas. And today, the Master of the whole world – the Lord who controls the cosmos – was about to sit on these soiled garments of the gopis!’ This is the zenith of the prema of the gopis. It is given in the main text. *Tatropavishto bhagavaan sa eeshvaro yoge`shvaraantarhridi kalpitaasanah, chakaasa gopeeparishadgatorchita strailokyalakshmye`kapadam vapurdadhat.* That Paramatma, who even great Yogis cannot easily persuade to sit on the lotuses of their hearts, sits today on the chunarees smeared with kumkum (vermillion), kajal, and sweat!

The Gita says, ‘*Tad viddhi pranipaate`na pariprashne`na se`vayaa.* You should bow down and render service to the Guru, before placing your question.’ The Shruti says: *Tad vigyaanaarthama sagurume`vaa vigachhe` samita paanee srotriyam brahmanishtham.* The gopis were not learned, but they were following the rules of the Shastras. They offered an asana to Bhagwan, then – *sabhaajayitvaa tamangagadeepanam* – they bowed down at His feet. They covered His feet with fragrant flowers. They offered the ceremonial respect due to a learned pundit.

Sanstutya eeshtakupitaa babhaashire` - sanstutya, they did the *stuti*, they eulogized Him, offered flowers, and bowed down.

The gopis' prema was being increased steadily. Their aspiration to do leela with Bhagwan was being enhanced by this great preacher. The gopis worshipped Him, gave Him an asana, and clung to Him lovingly; but they continued to give Him oblique looks.

Why?

They were still angry with Him, even though they praised Him! Just think of the leela of the gopis! They are now praising and worshipping the same Krishna who they used to tie up, chase with a stick, and make Him dance for a ball of butter! If Shri Krishna is *nata naagara*, aren't the gopis equally proficient actors? All their gestures with the one they love so greatly were nothing but play acting.

You and I pray to Prabhu. We recite passages of praise, with our eyes closed and our hands folded. The gopis made Prabhu sit on an asana, gave Him the respect due to a preacher, bowed down to Him, and worshipped Him with flowers. The only difference is that we remain serious when we do our worship, whereas the gopis were smiling, and giving oblique looks to Prabhu. This difference may seem to be a minor one, but it is very significant. Their prema is the summit of prema. There is a bit of anger in their heart, as they show all the signs of respect.

'Eeshatkupitaa babhaashire` - there is a spurt of anger in them, and this prompts them to ask a question.

What is this question?

'Bhajatonubhajantaye`ka e`ka e`nadviparyayam, nobhayaanshcha bhajantye`ka e`tanno broohi saadhu bhoh.' 'Sadhu bho' means a saintly, benevolent person. Shri Krishna had just returned, after playing a trick on them. Their anger – prompted by their love – is emerging. So when they say, 'You are a sadhu', is it a compliment or is it sarcasm? The praise is actually a rebuke. 'Sadhu bho' can be interpreted in two ways. One meaning is, 'please explain', and the other meaning is, 'You are saintly and benevolent. Please clarify our doubt.'

'What do you want to know?'

'We have heard that there are three kinds of people in this world. We haven't read it; we have just heard it.'

'What are they?'

'One kind – *bhajatonubhajantye`ka* – are those who love the person who loves them.'

'What is the second kind?'

'E`ka e`tadviparyayam – the second kind are those who love even the person who does not love them. Then, there is the third kind.'

'Who are they?'

'Nobhayaanshcha bhajantye`ka – they are those who love neither the one who loves them nor the one who doesn't. These are the three kinds of people, Shri Krishna, Please give us a detailed commentary on them, with examples of each kind. What are their characteristics and who are the living examples of each?'

The gopis were smiling, looking sideways at Shri Krishna. Shyam Sunder was embarrassed. He is *sarvagya* – all knowing. He is aware that this is not a *jigyaasaa*

(urge to know); this is a direct accusation. However, Bhagwan is Bhagwan, after all! He is *sarva samartha*. He has an answer for everything. He began to answer them in the order the questions were placed, with great seriousness.

Shri Krishna gave the first explanation: *'Mithobhajantiye`sakhyahsvaarthikaantodyamaahite` , na tatra sauhridam dharmah svaarthartham taddhim naanyathaa*. Gopis, when a person has prema for the one who loves him it is not prema at all. Our Shastras call it selfishness.' Cash gifts are given on occasions. If you give a hundred and one rupees on the occasion of the marriage of someone's son, and he gives a hundred and fifty one rupees when your son gets married, it is worldly interaction. It is not prema. Gifts are exchanged on suitable occasions, but it is not necessary that they are given lovingly. Our Shastras say that to love someone who loves you is worldly interaction; it is not prema. There is no need to give an example, because almost everyone is an example. This is the answer to the first point.

The second point is, *'Bhajantya bhajato ye` vai karunaah pitaro yathaa, dharmo nirapavaadotra sauhridam cha sumadhyamaah*. Prema is when a person loves even when the other person does not reciprocate his love. There can be no prema if there is any expectation. Then, it becomes self-interest. Only a person who loves with no consideration of any return has real prema.'

What is the conclusion? It is either the poorna Paramatma who has prema, or it is a Saint attached to Him. He may don red clothes or white – that is immaterial. He may even be a Grihastha. Or, it could be the love of a parent. Bhagwan is saying that only one of these has real prema. It is a beautiful analysis. It includes the prema of true parents. Why do I say 'true' parents? It is because some parents are selfish. Just as it is not enough to be born a human; we must be humane; in the same way, it is not enough to be a parent. A parent must love without self interest.

Whatever the child may be like, parents always want to see the good in them. They want their children to progress and prosper. There is a description in our Shastras, *'Kuputrojaayate` kvachidapi kumaataa na bhavati.'* A son may turn out to be a bad son, but a mother will always be his well-wisher. Parents always want their children to be good human beings.

I know a number of people whose children have settled abroad. If I say, 'You have been left alone in your old age,' they say, 'Maharaj, we will pass our days somehow. At least our children are happy!' This is parental love. It is the duty of the children to look after their parents, but it is selfishness that makes parents impose themselves upon their children. Please don't feel offended, but it is written here that prema is given only by Bhagwan, by His bhaktas, and by selfless parents.

Now we come to the third point. This is an accusation at Shri Krishna. 'Who is the one who does not love even those who love him?' Shri Krishna gave a very convoluted answer. 'There are four kinds of people who feel no love for even those who love them.'

Listen carefully to this strange dialogue. It is a wonderful leela. It thrills me whenever I read it!

Bhagwan said, 'Four kinds of people feel no love for even those who love them. They are *aatmaraama, aaptakaama, akritagya, and gurudrohi.*'

Atmarama refers to the Saints who are established in the Brahman. For them, no other exists – everyone is their own Atma, their own Self, their own essence. Who can such a person love, since there is no ‘other’? Prema is possible only in duality.

Aptakama refers to a person who is fully content within his Self. He may be aware of who loves him and who doesn’t, or who he should love. He is a great fool if he doesn’t understand this.

Now, if a person knows who loves him and who doesn’t, and he is also an atmarama and aptakama, and still he does not love the one who loves him, then he is a terrible offender. He is a gurudrohi. Gurudrohi means a person who commits a terrible offense.

Lalita looked at Vishakha. Where did Shri Krishna fit in? We have to understand the inference, since the question was about Shri Krishna, and He had understood its significance.

‘Is Shri Krishna atmarama?’ Just see the definition given by the gopis – you won’t find such a definition anywhere in the Shastras. This definition does not come from the intellect. It cannot come unless the heart is filled with prema. Vishakha said, ‘He is certainly not an atmarama! Had He been an atmarama, He would not have flirted with the gopis!’ Now, hear this definition. See where the gopis take the purna Brahman to! This was their first analysis.

Gurudruha – a terrible offender! ‘Yes, He fits into the fourth category. Neither is Shri Krishna atmarama, nor is He aptakama. He is not akritagya either (He does feel gratitude). He is a great offender. He knew everything when He granted us the *varadaana* (the boon that He would unite with us). He played the flute to call us, and then He left us! Now, He sits like a revered Guru!’ The gopis place Shri Krishna into the fourth category – that of being a terrible offender.

Shri Krishna was compelled to interrupt them. ‘Wait! Wait! Don’t jump to the conclusion that I am a gurudruha! I heard what you said. Give the matter a little more thought, before you decide that I am a great offender. Your conclusion is not correct.’

‘Why? We have used Your logic.’

‘What you say is true, gopis, but if you wanted to know why I vanished, why didn’t you ask Me directly? Why did you place these oblique questions before Me?’

Lalita said, ‘Well, tell us now! You are still seated on the *vyaasa aasana* (the seat of the Teacher), so tell us why You vanished suddenly when we were doing the Raas.’

This is where Shri Krishna begins His speech. This is where we learn what the gopis of Vraja actually are. Shri Krishna says, ‘*Naaham toom sakhyo bhajatopi jantoon bhajaamyameeshaamanuvrittivrittaye` yathaadhano labdhadhane` vinashte`, tashchintayaanyannibhrito na ve`da*. Gopis, you would have heard this – a poor person who longs for wealth is very happy if he suddenly gets great wealth. However, if that wealth is lost after a couple of days, he feels intense sorrow. His desire for wealth becomes far more acute. When he had no wealth, he was unhappy; but his sorrow is much greater when he loses the wealth he got unexpectedly. Have you understood the example?’

‘Yes.’

‘My task is the same. I always want the prema of My bhaktas to be increased. That is why I meet them, and then disappear. This intensifies and increases their prema for

Me. They savor My prema even more, when they meet Me again, after thinking they have lost Me.'

The words used by Bhagwan are, '*E`vam madarthojjhitalokave`da*. Gopis, I know that you sacrificed Dharma for My sake. You didn't bother about your social image.' Yes, even today, people cast aspersions on the gopis. Even in these times, we take care to ensure that our reputation is not sullied. The gopis are to be congratulated. They did not care what people may say. Their stand was, 'We belong to Krishna, and Krishna belongs to us.' Shri Shukadevji has certified this right from the beginning. The gopis sacrificed everything for Shri Krishna. Now, Shri Krishna is certifying it. '*Madarthojjhitalokave`da*. O gopis, for My sake you sacrificed the Vedic Dharma, the principle of the Vedas, all worldly considerations, and the taunts of society. You came to Me without giving a second thought to all these. If you want to ask Me why I disappeared, I ask you to answer the question yourselves. Tell Me, what was My purpose, when I disappeared?'

Shri Krishna raises this question. 'Had I not disappeared, the Gopi Geet hidden in your heart would have remained hidden. It would never have emerged. This Gopi Geet is the manifestation of the Krishna-prema in your heart. I vanished because I wanted this prema to be revealed.'

Shri Krishna made the matter clear. Not only did He praise the gopis, He said one more thing, which is enough to remove all doubts. 'Gopis, I will always be in your debt. Always!'

'Why?'

'Because of the pure prema you have for Me. In the Gita I have said that I reciprocate the love that is given to Me. *Ye` yathaa maam bhajante`taan tathaibhajaamee*. You have given up everything, and loved Me alone; but I am unable to keep My word. I can't give up everything and love only you.' Bhagwan can do everything and anything, but this is something He can't do. Why is that? It is because every bhakta loves only Bhagwan, but Bhagwan can't restrict His love to any one Bhakta. 'I am unable to keep My word, and so I will remain indebted to you forever, gopis. Even if I take the life spans of all the Devtas, it is impossible for Me to be free of My debt to you.' This is what Bhagwan Shri Krishna says.

The Parabrahma Paramatma is the one who rules the world. He is acknowledging His debt to the gopis. If we believe in Bhagwan, but don't believe what He says, our belief in Him is not real.

The feelings of the gopis changed at once, when they heard this. Their anger – caused by their love and hurt – vanished. They looked at Shri Krishna with wonder. Shri Krishna's body tingled with love for the gopis. Tears glistened in His eyes. The gopis folded their hands and said, 'Shri Krishna, our life belongs to You; it is for You. We cannot bear the thought of Your being indebted to us. You said that You will always remain in our debt – the very thought is unbearable! There must be some way out!'

What is the solution? Shri Krishna says, 'I have no solution to offer, since I am unable to love you as you have loved Me. Even if I want to repay your debt, I cannot do it.' Shri Krishna thought deeply for a while, then said, 'There is just one method.' Please listen carefully to the solution given by Shri Krishna. These wonderful things are connected to the Maha Raas.

The gopis listened eagerly. ‘What is the solution? Tell us quickly!’

Shri Krishna gave an example. ‘Gopis, if someone is burdened with a debt that he can never repay, there is only one way by which he can become free of that debt; and that is, if his creditor writes off the debt. This is the only way he can be freed of the debt he owes. There is no other way.

I am a debtor of your prema, gopis. The only way I can be free of this debt is if you free Me – not just verbally, but from the depths of your heart. This is the only way out. *Samvrishcha tad vah pratiyaanusaadhunaa.*’ This is what is written here.

The gopis responded instantly. ‘Prabhu! You are our life! You are our all in all! We see You – not as a debtor, but as our *aaraadhya* – the object of our worship. We say, not only with our whole heart, but with our very lives, that You owe us nothing! You are not in our debt. We say this not once, but ten times! You are not indebted to us; You owe us nothing!’

So, good people, we should understand the quality and the depth of the gopis’ love for Shri Krishna. We will then understand what the Raas leela is; the elevated level of this leela. We must understand the foundation upon which this leela is based, what Prabhu says, and what the gopis say. I feel disinclined to give repeated clarifications about this leela. It is far removed from the sordid aspect of carnal considerations.

(Discourse of the eighth day)

Come; let us take our minds once again to that divine spot where the sweetest and most profound of Bhagwan's leela took place. For those who can enter into its essence, it is extremely sweet, but it is extremely *klishhta* (difficult; distressing) for those who lack the spiritual maturity to understand it in its proper perspective. This leela is difficult to hear, understand, and meditate on. Even among the people who were listening to Shukadevji there were some who had doubts about it, so it is not surprising that people in our modern times question its propriety. But if someone succeeds in entering the spirit of this leela, the *rasa* he obtains is unparalleled. That is the quality of its sweetness. We return to the discourse.

The gopis had a delightful conversation with Thakurji. Shri Krishna accepted that He was the gopis' debtor. 'Gopis, I can be free of this debt only if you tell Me that you have released Me from My debt to you. This is the only way out for Me. Otherwise, I shall remain indebted to you forever.'

Shri Krishna was overcome with emotion while saying this. The gopis understood the depth of His love for them. Their twisted, angry reaction, caused by their *prema*, was erased. The words given here are: *Idam bhagavato gopyah shrutvaa vaachaala supe`shalaah*. The word *supe`shala* is used. Our Maharajji had a delightful habit of playing with words. He would say that this Sanskrit word – *supeshala* – became 'special' in English. The meaning is the same in both languages. Maharajji also gave a meaning to the word 'raas'. The rules of Sanskrit grammar say that the letters 'da', 'la' and 'ra' can be interchanged without effecting the meaning of the word. So, when the traditional Indian dance was connected to Bhagwan, it was called 'raas'. When it was connected to Western culture, it was called 'dance'. It is the same word. See how wonderful our ancient language, Sanskrit, is. See how it infiltrates other languages. I am amazed to see Sanskrit words mixed in not only Indian languages, but also in many foreign languages, including German. It seems that perhaps there was a time when Sanskrit was used all over the world.

So; it is said here, '*Vaachah shrutve` supe`shalaah* – the two special points about Shri Krishna.' What happened when the gopis heard Shri Krishna's sweet and profound words? *Juhurviraahanam taapam* – the gopis let go the burning of *viyog* and the crookedness of love. They looked at the Raas Behari Bhagwan they worshipped, and were filled with happiness. Bhagwan had said that this was the time for doing Raas. It was the gopis who had dawdled, asking Him to answer their questions first.

Now, when the gopis understood Shri Krishna's feelings, and His deep love for them, their hurt and indignation were removed completely. Bhagwan Shri Krishna looked at them smilingly. 'Let the Raas leela commence', said His eyes. He did not need to speak. No words are spoken by either Shri Krishna or the gopis. The message was conveyed and received through the eyes, and they all moved towards the flat platform of sand, to do Raas. This leela of Bhagwan is wonderful, because it increases our *prema* for Him. Prabhu gives *sanyog-viyog* to deepen our love for Him. Or, you can say that He gives *pyaasa* (thirst) and *tripti* (satisfaction) turn by turn, so that the leela of enhancing *bhakti* continues unabated.

What did Bhagwan do then? Didn't He know which was the type of Raas that would give *poornaananda* (absolute bliss) to the gopis? Of course He knew! However, that is not how He started the Raas.

Why didn't He start with that method?

He wanted to enhance the intensity of the gopis' desire. The first Raas was done with Shri Kishoriji and Raas Behari Bhagwan in the middle, and the gopis dancing in a circle around them. They began to dance to a slow rhythm – *taataa-thai, taataa-thai*. Prabhu's feet began to move, and the gopis' feet began to move in step. The Devtas were alert already, watching from their air planes. They started to play their *dundubhis*, and showered celestial flowers from above.

It is written here that Bhagwan and the gopis danced on the holy bank of the Jamunaji, and the Apsaras danced in the heavens above. Gandharvas began to sing. Someone asked why the Apsaras were dancing above. It is because they had no entry into Bhagwan's Maha Raas. Can it be a leela of mortals, when even celestial beings are unable to enter it? Would it be some ordinary frolic that Devtas yearn to participate in?

The Maha Raas started to a special type of rhythm and dance. Bhagwan Shri Krishna and Kishoriji were in the center, encircled by the dancing gopis. You would have seen the folk dances of Gujarat – called the '*garbaa*' or '*daandiyaa*' – they are very popular these days. This is how the Raas commenced. Everyone experienced joy. Do you know why? It is because every gopi had the feeling that Bhagwan's face is turned towards her. Every gopi watched His *shreemukha* (divine face) as she danced to His rhythm.

However, the gopis wanted to unite with Prabhu. They felt very happy to be dancing with Him, but they wished they could also obtain His touch. 'How lovely it would be, to have Shri Krishna's hand in mine, while dancing.' One of Bhagwan's names is, '*Bhaktavaancchaakalpataru*' (the wish-fulfilling tree for His bhaktas). The moment this wish arose, it was fulfilled. However, even here, Bhagwan played His little tricks, because He is a little crooked! Not just a little crooked; He is crooked in three places. Shri Krishna's form is generally bent in three places. His head is bent, His waist is bent and His knee is bent.

What did Shri Krishna do? He manifested in many forms. He appeared as a separate Krishna in between every two gopis. There were now two gopis, and one Krishna, two gopis and one Krishna, and so on. Each gopi held one hand of Shri Krishna and one hand of the gopi next to her. Shri Krishna decided to fulfill the gopis' wish, but what did He do? '*Taasaam madhye` dvayordvayo.*' What did He do at the start of the second Maha Raas? He manifested so that there were twice as many gopis as the forms of Shri Krishna. He held the hands of the gopis on either side of Him, as they danced.

Until now, the gopis had not got the thrill of Shri Krishna's touch. They now remained lost in ecstasy and went on dancing for a long time.

Please note this point: at the end of this episode it is written that this was not just an ordinary Sharad Purnima night. It was also the night of the Devtas, which lasts for six months of our time. All the nights of the whole year had accumulated that night,

making it six months long. Else, how could so much have happened in just one night?

When did this leela begin? It started in the evening. So many things happened. Shri Krishna and the gopis first had a discussion. Then they danced the Laghu Raas. Then Prabhu vanished, and the gopis searched everywhere for Him. Then the gopis sang the Gopi Geet. Prabhu met them, and clarified the doubts they had. I don't think that all this could be accomplished in a single night even today.

In a situation where love reached its zenith, nobody existed for Shri Krishna except the gopis; and nobody existed for the gopis except Shri Krishna. Under the circumstances, it was just not possible that so much could happen in the duration of one night. Commentators have written clearly. '*Brahmaraatre` samupaavrite`*', meaning, the night of Brahma and the Devtas, which is equal to six months of ours. The *dakshyaana* (the last six months of the year) are the Devtas' night, and the *uttaraayana* (first six months of the year) are the Devtas' day.

So, good people, the dance commenced with one Krishna in-between every two gopis. They derived deep joy in this way of dancing, and went on dancing for a long time. Shukadevji describes how the bangles jingled on the gopis' arms, and the anklets tinkled on their feet, and the ornaments round their waist clinked as they danced. They danced in rhythm and the clinking of their ornaments was rhythmic too. The celestial dundubhis beat to the same rhythm, and bees buzzed to the rhythm, too. See the effect of the Maha Raas on Prakriti (Nature).

It is not that only Shri Krishna and the gopis were present. The main text says, '*Bhramaragaayakaraasagoshtayaam.*' How can the humming of bees be heard among the clamor of all the other sounds? The dundubhis of the Devtas were playing, the ornaments of thousands of gopis were tinkling, and Gandharvas were singing.

The thing is that the Gandharvas became so entranced by the Raas leela that they sometimes forgot to sing. They began to wish that they had been gopis, and could have participated in this divine Raas with Bhagwan. It is when they stopped singing that the humming of the bees could be heard. This was no ordinary Raas. The moving and the unmoving life took part in it.

It is written that half the grains of sand became black, and half remained white.

Why did that happen?

This happened because the gopis were all fair, and the Krishnas were all dark. So, all Prakriti – the animate and the inanimate – joined in the Raas leela. This Raas leela is divine. How can we say that it is an ordinary leela, natural to human nature? This is no ordinary frolic.

The gopis are dancing – *paadanyaasairbhujavidhutibhih sasmitairbhruvilaasaih*. They take dainty steps, raise their eyebrows, and dance so beautifully that nobody can understand how they can dance so well. They all savored the sublime bliss of this dance. After that – what Prabhu wanted, happened. The gopis held one hand of Shri Krishna, because He manifested separately in-between every two gopis, and one hand of the gopi next to them. Every gopis wished she could have Shri Krishna's hands in both her hands. This is *pyaasa* – thirst for Bhagwan. This is the leela that increases prema. He does everything to give happiness to His bhaktas, but also keeps

doing something to ensure that their prema continues to rise. *Pratikshanam vardhamaanam*. It is the nature of pure love to grow steadily.

Shukadevji says, 'Rajan! Prabhu – who can do everything and anything – becomes helpless before His bhaktas. He can't do anything. He becomes so impatient to fulfill their wishes that He is unable to control Himself, even if He wants to! The moment the desire arose in the gopis' mind, *kartum akartum anyathaa kartum* – the all-powerful Prabhu multiplied Himself, so there was one Krishna with every gopi.'

Now, there were as many Krishnas as there were gopis. However, there was something very strange. What was that? The strange fact was that none of the gopis knew that Shri Krishna was dancing with any other gopi. This is *bhagavattaa* – the unique power of Bhagwan. This is the divine Raas leela. How can it be done by any human being? Shri Krishna multiplied His forms. Each and every gopi felt that she alone was dancing with Shri Krishna. The gopis were so immersed in sublime bliss that they had no time to look at anyone, to see who was doing what. They had no curiosity. They were seeped in divine ecstasy.

And then Bhagwan Shri Krishna frolicked with different gopis in different ways. He sang with some as they danced. It says here that classical music was used. They sang in a style called 'Dhrupad'. The gopis started singing. The pitch of a female voice is higher than the pitch of a male voice. The word '*unninye*' is used here, to indicate that the pitch of the gopis' voice was higher than that of Shri Krishna. Raas Behari Bhagwan smiled and exclaimed in appreciation. Couldn't Prabhu sing at an even higher pitch? Of course He could! However, Bhagwan enjoys it when His premi defeats Him in anything.

Bhagwan applauds a gopi who dances exceptionally well. One gopi feels very tired. She stands still, resting her hand on Shyam Sunder's shoulder. Bhagwan is an ocean of compassion. The night air becomes refreshingly cool. The gopis are perspiring because of their exertions. Thakurji fans them gently. *Bhagavaana bhaktam bhaktivaana*. Yes! Bhagwan is the bhakta of those who have bhakti for Him.

It is given in two places in the Bhagwat that all the people in the world are Bhagwan's bhaktas. However, has anyone ever asked Bhagwan, 'Whose bhakta are You? We are all Your bhaktas, but who do You have bhakti for?'

Bhagwan says, 'I am the bhakta of those who love Me the way the gopis loved Me. I serve such bhaktas.'

Just imagine – Bhagwan fans the gopis who are perspiring! Can these gopis be ordinary mortals? Great Saints consider themselves to be fortunate if they get a glimpse of Bhagwan even in a dream. That same Thakurji is serving the gopis!

Then, they began to dance again. Shukadevji has described it beautifully. All the Rishi-Munis seated there gazed at him in surprise. Shukadevji was an *avadhoota*; his renunciation was total. He did not even have a loin cloth on his body. Yet he was giving such a detailed description of the dancing and singing of Shri Krishna and the gopis.

Shri Shukadevji has given a hint, that this is a divine leela. We should not question it on the basis of worldly perceptions. There was no need for Shukadevji to say the shlokas during this description, had he not observed the doubtful expression of the faces of some of his listeners. Shukadevji says, '*Re`me` rame`sho vrajasundareebhi*

yathaarmaka svapratibimbavibhramah. Rishis, what is this dance of Shri Krishna like? It is like a little child – maybe two or three years old – who looks at his own reflection in a mirror at home. The child laughs at his reflection, and plays with it, as though there was another little boy inside the mirror, imitating his gestures. Similarly, Shri Krishna is the *bimba* (the tangible object) and the gopis are the *pratibimba* (reflected images). This is a dance between the *bimba* (a halo of light) and its reflected image. Shri Krishna is the *bimba* and the gopis are the *pratibimba*. Do the *bimba* and *pratibimba* have separate existence when they dance? Can the *pratibimba* exist without the *bimba*? There is no difference between an image and its reflection.

Therefore, Prabhu is *rasa-svaroop*a – the essence of *rasa*, but when He wants to be *raasa-svaroop*a – the essence of *Rasa*, it is necessary for His *bimba* to appear as so many *pratibimb*as. Only then will *Raas* be possible., and only then can He be the essence of *Raas*.

Shukadevji says that this dancing is just like a child dancing with his own reflection. That means, all the gopis are actually *vritti* (inclinations; mental tendencies) of the *shakti* (power) of His divine leela. They are innumerable manifestations of His Shakti. This is the special leela of the Shakti and the *shaktimaana* (the one who possesses Shakti). It is in no way related to this mundane world of ours. There is nothing to cause embarrassment, because it is a leela that is quite different from anything carnal or worldly. Many Saints have refused to do the *kathaa* (give public discourses) on this leela. Nor do they describe the *cheera harana leelaa* (the leela when Shri Krishna took away the clothes of the gopis while they were bathing in the river). They say, ‘Go and do bhajan first, and then listen to these leelas. Sing devotional songs, develop prema for Bhagwan and understand His essence, before listening to these leelas.’

Ayur Veda has a medicine called ‘Swarna Bhasma’. It gives strength and vitality to people above fifty years of age, but if a person below forty takes it, it can affect his sanity. The description of the *Raas* leela is somewhat like that. It benefits only those who are spiritually mature. People have to reach a certain level of spirituality to be eligible to hear it; otherwise their mind is likely to go astray.

Shukadevji Maharaj continued to narrate the leelas. He was totally immersed in them. He was unconcerned with what people thought. He did not want to waste time in explaining the truth of the matter to immature people. Shukadevji described how Shri Krishna danced, how He embraced the gopis, how He placed His hand on a gopi’s head, etc. Shri Krishna’s *vana-maalaa* (multicolored garland) was wet with the gopis’ perspiration. The kumkum (vermillion) of a gopi was smeared on His vanamala. Bees came and sat on the vanamala again and again. This was a divine leela.

Someone asked, ‘What else happened?’

The Chandrama (moon) was enthralled! Kamadeva was entranced from the very beginning. The Chandrama is a relative of Bhagwan. It was he who had made all the preparations for the Maha Raas. It is written here, ‘*Kaamaarditaah shashaankashcha sagano vismitobhavat.*’ All Chandrama’s satellites were also entranced along with him. They were astonished to see this extraordinary leela.

Then, here is another aspect. What happened when Chandrama became entranced? When someone forgets himself, he forgets where he wants to go and what he wants to do! Chandrama stopped moving, and the night did not progress. It was like Rama naumi (the day Shri Rama was born). It is the purifying birth date of Shri Rama today, isn't it? In the Ramacharitmanas it is written, '*Maanasa divasa kara divasa maam*' – the day became one month long.

Why?

There was such a magnificent celebration at Ayodhya that Surya Bhagwan (the sun) stopped to watch. He forgot to move on. There was no sunset. Rama naumi lasted for a full month! And here, the Sharad Purnima night lasted for six months, because the Chandrama stood still. Not only did the Chandrama stand still along with all his satellites, all the stars and planets in the sky remained stationary. They were all watching the divine leela.

Prabhu saw that the gopis were tired after dancing for so long. Prabhu is Bhagwan, but the gopis aren't Bhagwan. A physical body is bound to feel fatigue after exertion. Shri Krishna stopped the Raas for a while. He praised the gopis, congratulated them, and fanned them to remove their fatigue.

Do you know what happened when the gopis felt refreshed? They all went into the Kalindi. And, it was not only the gopis and Shri Krishna who went into the river – even the bees went into the water along with Shri Krishna!

How could a bee go into the water?

The bees that were sitting on Shri Krishna's vanamala were unwilling to leave Shri Krishna's proximity, even when He went into the water. They also joined in the bathing and frolic of the gopis and Shri Krishna.

Then the gopis started jumping over Shri Krishna in the water. This was a water sport. They derived great joy in splashing water on Shri Krishna. It is written here that until this time, the Devis (wives of the Devtas) who were watching from above had retained their self-control; but now they swooned with emotion. It is written that the sky overhead was filled with the air planes of the Devtas and Devis, who were watching Shri Krishna's divine leelas. 'Why did we not get the great good fortune of participating in this leela?' thought the Devis.

Bhagwan continued to give delight to the gopis. They frolicked in the water for a long time, splashing each other and racing in the water. Even the Devtas were unable to retain their composure. Some of them fainted, and some sat as though stunned. Kamadeva, poor chap, went and stood in a corner. He knew that there was no place for him in this divine leela.

After frolicking in the Jamunaji for a long time, Shri Krishna and the gopis came out of the water. They then began the *vana-vihaara* (frolic in the forest). The air was filled with the fragrance of flowers. The trees were so dense that even the bright moonlight of the Sharad Purnima did not penetrate the foliage. Shri Krishna and the gopis entered the forest, running around, dancing, and teasing one another. They did all the leelas. Shukadevji Maharaj went on describing these sublime frolics. Of the people listening to him, there were some who understood the divine quality of the leela, but some looked at Shukadevji in surprise, wondering what had come over this Monk whose renunciation was total.

Our Shri Maharajji told us about the discourses he used to give at Jabalpur when he was still a young man. Even his voice (recorded on tapes) sounds different. Seth Govind Dasji used to organize our Gurudev's *kathaa* (discourses) at Shahid Smarak regularly. Once, Maharajji was doing a katha on the episode of the Maha Raas. What I am telling you is a true incident. With an episode like the Maha Raas, and a speaker like Maharajji, the katha was so alluring that cinema houses began to go empty. The owners of the cinema houses came to Maharajji, asking him to change the timings of the katha, so that people could go to the cinema without missing the katha. This is the leela of the Maha Raas!

However, there are always two sides to everything. This is what the cinema owners said on the one hand. On the other hand, their supporters in the press began to write critical articles in the newspapers. 'A young Sanyasi is giving public discourses on the exhilaration of dancing and singing in the moonlight. Will this benefit our society? It is more likely to encourage people to go astray!'

People told Maharajji that the press was maligning him. Maharajji said, 'Let them write what they want. It does not matter.'

'Should we use money power to counter it?'

'No. If our Krishna-prema is genuine, He will change their hearts. There is no need to use influence.'

This is just what happened. The people who like to listen to the katha may miss a katha occasionally, but those who want to criticize it are sure to attend, in order to talk about what was said. The reporters came. See the Grace of Shri Krishna – people tell us that on the fifth day, the reporters came to Maharajji and apologized. 'Maharajji, we misjudged you.' They began to write in favor of the katha. This has always been the trend.

There is another incident about our Gurudev that comes to mind. I will not name of the magazine, but there is a popular magazine that is very critical about Dharma and Mahatmas. Once they wrote something objectionable about Maharajji. A deputation of Mahatmas and learned Pundits came to Maharajji. He understood why they had come and smiled. 'Welcome, Mahatmas and Pundits. It is very gracious of you to come today. What can I do for you?'

'Maharajji, don't you know what has been written about you?'

'Yes, I know, and I expect that this is the purpose of your coming. What do you want to do?'

'We will all get together and write against that journalist.'

'What is the need for that?' Maharajji's magnanimity was amazing!

'Maharajji, we hold you in such high regard – what will people think, when they read such things?'

See the outlook of a Mahapurush. Nobody can imagine Maharajji's reply. 'That is all right,' he said. 'But they have given my address correctly, haven't they?'

'Yes, Maharajji. They have given the proper address. Anand Vrindavan in the district of Mathura.'

'That is all right, then. If the address is correct there is no need to oppose this article. The more they criticize me, the more people will flock to see what the truth is. And,

when people come here and see the reality, they will not oppose us; they will become one of us. This magazine is not harming us. It is giving us publicity.'

See the viewpoint of a Saint! How loftily he dealt with an issue that would have agitated ordinary people like us.

What is the purport of saying this? There are always some people who approve and some who disapprove. Shukadevji saw this, when he was describing the Maha Raas, the jala vihara and the vana vihara. Some of the listeners failed to understand its spiritual significance. Seeing the expression on their faces, Shukadevji Maharaj stopped describing the leelas. Unless the listener is mature enough, he is not eligible to hear about the Raas leela.

Raja Parikshit became grave. He felt that Shukadevji wanted to continue describing the Raas leela. It seems that that was indeed the case, because after describing the vana vihara, Shukadevji spoke of their return to the sandy banks of the Jamunaji. The gopis bowed down to Shri Krishna. He told them to go back to their own homes.

What else happened during the vana vihara? The Bhagwat contains no descriptions about how Shri Krishna and the gopis returned to the riverside. It is the tradition of Saints to stop describing Prabhu's leelas if the listeners are ineligible. Raja Parikshit understood that this was why Shukadevji had cut short the katha. There were no doubts in Raja Parikshit, whatsoever. It is possible that Shukadevji continued to watch the leela in his heart, even though he stopped speaking about it. Seeing the situation Raja Parikshit asked a representative question on behalf of the people who had doubts about the propriety of the Raas leela.

*'Sansthaapanaaya dharmasya prashamaate`yarasya cha,
avateerno hi bhagavaanashane` jagadeeshvarah.*

*Sa katham dharmase`toonaam vaktaa kartaabhirakshitaa,
prateepamaacharad brahman paradaaraabhimarshanam.*

The purpose of Prabhu's Avatar was to protect the Saints, destroy *adharma* (that, which is contrary to Dharma) and establish Dharma. Why did He do all these leelas, Maharaj?' Parikshit indulged in some exaggeration – *paradaaraa bhimarshanam* – and was rebuked for it. 'Why did Prabhu do the Maha Raas with the wives of other men?'

You all have been listening attentively to this katha for the past seven days. You will know that the word *paradaaraabhimarshanam* is wrongly used. The question is also faulty. The gopis had done *saadhanaa* (effort for spiritual progress) and had obtained Bhagwan's *varadaana*, that they would get Him as their husband. So how can they be called 'other men's wives'? This is one point.

The Bhagwat says that some gopis left their families and came to Shri Krishna. These can be considered to be *parakeeya* (other men's wives). The wife of another man is considered to be more attractive, adding to the flavor of romance. That is why Prabhu did this leela. In truth, all the gopis are *svakeeya* (His own). People who have a good knowledge of our Shastras know that there is no question of *paradaaraabhimarshanam* here. The question itself is faulty.

Shukadevji replied gravely. '*Dharmavyatikramo drishta*. Although your assessment is incorrect, I am giving you the answer based on your question. What Shri Krishna did was not *adharma*. All that I have told you so far makes it clear that Shri Krishna

never does anything that is contrary to Dharma. Nor do the gopis. However, since you are asking, I want to point out that when an enlightened Mahatma – who has attained the Ishwara – or, the Ishwara Himself, does something that is considered to be wrong for ordinary people, we should not view it critically. This is the ruling of the Shastras.’

Shukadevji gave the example of *agni* (fire), Gangaji, and *surya* (the sun). You all know that if a pot of water is accidentally touched to a corpse, the water becomes impure and has to be thrown away. However, when a corpse is put into the Gangaji, the Gangaji does not become impure; the corpse becomes pure. The jeeva (Atma attached to a body) of the person who died goes to higher realms. Common people are like the water in a pot, while the Mahapurush are like the Gangaji.

When we touch something impure, we have to bathe to cleanse ourselves; but agni purifies all the impure things that are put into it. Fire never becomes impure. Is it not so? Goswamiji has written the same thing in the Ramchirritmanas, and the same point is given here. *Samaratha ko nahin dosha gosaaee ravi paavaka surasari kee naayee.*

What is the reason that these never become impure? It is because of their purifying capacity. Shukadevji says, ‘Even though I see no adharma in this episode, I am giving the answer for those who have doubts. If an enlightened Saint is seen doing something that we consider to be improper, we should not accuse them of adharma. They have the capacity to rise above worldly norms. Adharma does not touch them.’

The intellectuals of today – whose livelihood depends on their knowledge and dialectic ability – refuse to accept this answer. They do not agree that Bhagwan is entitled to do whatever He wants.

So, Shukadevji gives three more examples. One is from the viewpoint of Vedanta, the second is from the viewpoint of bhakti, and the third is from the viewpoint of common logic.

The Vedantic viewpoint is, ‘*Gopeenaam tatpateenaam cha sarve`shaame`va de`hinaam.* Rajan, give thought to where the fault lies. Anger is towards someone else, lust is for another object. Pride is towards another person, and greed is also for something else. All these faults can exist only in duality. They cannot arise if there is no other. Where everything is experienced as our own Atma, there remains no scope for any of these.’

What are you trying to say?

‘Is Bhagwan Shri Krishna separate from the gopis? If you say, “yes”, then – who abides in the gopis as their Atma? The consciousness in the gopis is the pure, non-dual consciousness. The Brahman is non-dual; He is Sacchidananda. He is the *sattaa* (pure existence) that is non-dual. He is the *chittaa* (pure consciousness) that is non-dual; and He is the *aanandataa* (pure bliss) that is non-dual. So, is the *sat-chit-aananda* in the gopis separate from the *sat-chit-aananda* in Shri Krishna? If it is separate, Shri Krishna is not Bhagwan at all; and if He is Bhagwan, then the essence of the gopis is not separate from Shri Krishna’s essence. And if you say the essence is one, the gopis are not ‘other’. If the gopis are not separate, there is no scope of any faulty feeling or action. For an enlightened Saint, nothing exists except the non-dual Atma. Faulty feelings never arise in their minds. This is seen in the lives of Saints.’ This is the explanation from the viewpoint of Vedanta.

And from the viewpoint of bhakti?

Shukadevji Maharaj says, 'Rajan! People like us cross over the ocean of this world by doing bhajan (adoring) of Shyam Sunder. If we say, '*Shreekrishna govinda hare`muraare` he` naatha naaraayana vaasude`va,*' all the wrong tendencies in our mind will automatically recede.' You can try this for yourself. If you feel anger rising up, do Bhagwan's bhajan and see its affect on yourself. Your anger will gradually subside.

Can it ever be that He, whose worship results in faults being removed, can have faults? How can Shri Krishna have faults in Him, when his very name is enough to remove our faults?

The third point. It is as though the person said, 'All right. I accept that Shri Krishna does not have faults; but it is possible that the gopis had carnal desires.'

The questions people ask are not necessarily correct. This is an age-old opinion. It is true that according to the Bhagwat the gopis had no faulty desires. Even so, let us assume for a moment that they did have carnal desires. See Shukadevji's revolutionary response to this possibility.

'I do not believe that the gopis had lust, but since you ask my opinion on this possibility, I give it. What I say is that the gopis did not connect their desire with anything worldly; they connected their desire to the Parameshwara. They connected it to Raas Behari Bhagwan Shri Krishna. When desire gets attached to the world it takes us to Narak (Hell), but if it is attached to Shri Krishna it helps us to obtain Him.'

This is a great source of strength for us.

How does it become a great source of strength?

We will not get disheartened if we have desires. We can attach our desire to Shri Krishna, get rid of it, and obtain Him. This is the third answer.

What is there to fear? 'Very well; I accept that desire was present, but who was it connected to? Who was the object of desire?' These are the gopis, you know! A Saintly Monk like Shukadevji is singing their praises because the object of their desire was Shri Krishna. Great souls like Uddhav pray to Bhagwan, asking for the dust of the gopis' feet. Brahma, who creates the world, prays to Bhagwan for the dust of the feet of the gopis. How did this happen? Only because the gopis got attached to Shri Krishna!

So, people like you and me have no need to despair. If we are free of faults, it is God's Grace. If we have faults, we should connect them to Bhagwan, and they will go away. We will obtain Bhagwan. This is the fourth explanation. After this, where is the scope to suspect the purity of the Raas leela? How can anyone have doubts about it?

Shukadevji says, 'Rajan! So much time passed gradually. *Brahmaraatre`upaavritte`*. The six month long night was ending.' Do you think it was only the vana vihara that Shukadevji avoided describing? Commentators say that Shukadevji avoided describing many other Raas leelas that took place. We obtain such deep joy by listening to just the little that has been described. And thus, the night of Brahmaji passed, and the *brahmamuhurta* (the time just before dawn) arrived.

Bhagwan Shri Krishna tells the gopis, ‘Gopis, there is a limit to time. There is a limit to our being together in *saguna* (tangible) forms. The time for today is getting over, so you should, all of you, please go back to your homes.’

This is *poorna samarpana* (total surrender). Even after the bliss of doing Raas for such a long time, not one of the thousands of gopis told Shri Krishna that she did not want to return to her home.

Poorna samarpana! The gopis had protested earlier, but even at that time, they had not refused to return. They had pleaded that they were in no condition to go back. They had obtained the bliss of the Raas vihara (the frolic of the Raas). All the gopis bowed at Shri Krishna’s feet and went back to their own homes just before daybreak. Shukadevji says, ‘Rajan! I had told you earlier, that some of the men-folk had shut their doors, sitting with sticks, guarding the gopis. They were still sitting at their doors, fast asleep. They knew that the gopis were safely sleeping inside the house. The physical forms of the gopis were indeed inside the houses.’

One commentator raised a question. ‘You say that the night was six months long, and that the divine essence (subtle bodies) of the gopis had left their gross bodies and participated in the Maha Raas. How did the gross bodies survive for six months?’

‘Oh, if Bhagwan can keep the gopas asleep for six months, can’t He preserve the gopis’ physical forms for six months? The subtle bodies of the gopis entered their gross bodies again. None of the gopas knew that the gopis had gone anywhere, or had come back. They were all happy in their own homes.’

I had studied Vedanta under Swami Baba Ramdevji Maharaj. He was a very simple, straightforward person. Apart from the four explanations given by Shukadevji Maharaj, Swamiji had his own additional explanation. He would say, ‘Tell me, if the husbands of the gopis had no problem, what is your problem? The families of the gopis were perfectly happy. They were not bothered by anything. Have the gopis made you their lawyer and asked you to judge whether they did right or wrong?’

Shukadevji says, ‘Rajan! There is one more clarification in the last shloka.

*Vikreeditam vrajavadhooobhiridam cha vishnoh
shraddhaanvitonushrunuyaadatha varnaye`d yah,
bhaktim paraam bhagavati pratilabhya kaamam
hridrogamaashvapahinotyachire`na dheerah.*

Rajan! All the desires of a person who describes this Raas leela with *pre`ma* (pure love) and *shraddhaa* (faith), are removed.’ The qualities – *prema* and *shraddha* – are underlined. When this leela has the power to remove desires, how can there be any scope for desire to be present in it? Had desire been present, this leela would never have the power to free a person from desire. It is important to have faith and *prema* when this leela is heard or narrated.

And, good people, I have experienced this myself. On our way home yesterday, I told Ma that I have done this katha twice before, in other places. However, the joy I experienced in doing it here is something extra special, which she would also have felt. All the new aspects that came to me here, had never occurred to me earlier; nor have I read them in any book. I have a habit of reading for at least an hour every day. These novel thoughts are the result of the influence of this garden and the listeners. Ma and Babuji are seated here; the spiritual level of the listeners affects the speaker.

And then, my Gurudev, Swami Akhandnandji Maharaj has given discourses here for several years.

After my Guruji, Pujya Pundit Ramkinkarji Maharaj had been my mentor. He had also given discourses here for several years. I would sit in the audience and listen to their discourses. This is the same courtyard! Regarding these two Mahapurusha, I can state – sitting on the *vyaasaasana* (the seat of the Teacher) – that they were *saakshaat bhagvat svaroop*a (they had merged into the essence of Bhagwan). I do not say this on the strength of faith or belief. What I say is based on my personal experience. In my opinion, the people who have seen and heard them have had a darshan of Bhagwan; they have met Bhagwan! Even today, the words of these Saints are available to us, through their books and cassettes. I urge you to read and listen to them.

There was a Saint in Vrindavan who had a very sweet imagination. ‘How nice it would be if.....’

If what?

‘If videography would have been there, when Shri Krishna gave Arjuna the sermon of the Gita!’ The thought is so sweet! What I say is that for us, this is seen clearly. We have seen Pujya Gurudev and Ramkinkarji Maharaj. We have listened to the discourses of these enlightened Saints. We have their recorded videos. We do not need to wander in the world seeking answers to our doubts. Whenever I was troubled by some doubt, I would open any one of Gurudev’s books casually. The book would open on a page where the answer was given! Or, I would get the answer on the daily calendar’s message. The speech of the Saints has an eternal validity. It is our good fortune that videography and audiography were there in their lifetimes, enabling us to see and hear them today. Whatever we see in this life is by the Grace and compassion of these Mahapurush.

I am touched by the affection of all of you, who listened to the katha, I obtained deep joy from the discourses, and also in staying with Ma and Babuji, for whom I have tremendous regard. To see their ideal lifestyle is an education in itself.

So, good people, although I always enjoy doing the katha here, this time I have experienced an even greater joy. All of you listened lovingly. My respected Bhaiyaji also came. Jajooji, Jhunjhunwallaji and other learned people are sitting here. They could also have given the discourses. I feel that it is a great Grace of Thakurji. I bow down repeatedly at Prabhu’s feet, and express my gratitude to all of you. With these words:

Om Shantih Shantih Shantih.

Thanksgiving

By

Dr. Sarala Basantkumar Birla

Respected Swami Girishanandji Maharaj and lovers of Satsang.

Today we conclude this eight day festival, held in the vast courtyard of the Laxmi-Narayan Mandir.

On behalf of us both, I first offer my respects to Pujya Pundit Ramkinkarji Maharaj, who had drenched us with the sweetness of Ram Katha for thirty years, in this same courtyard. His blessings are with us.

Today is also the birthday of Pujya Kakoji, Shri Ghanshyamdasji. He had also come here and bestowed his blessings on us. I offer him our respectful pranams.

Swami Girishanandji, you were a disciple of Param Pujya Swami Akhandanandji and served him with loving devotion. It is due to this that you have, at such a young age, become such a brilliant exponent of the Bhagwat. The style of your discourses is incomparable! In the past eight days, we have often been overcome with emotion, seeing how you become overcome with devotion during your discourses. The episode of the Maha Raas is profound. The hearts of your listeners have been filled with devotion as we listened to you.

Swami Girishanandji told us that the Parameshwara is the form of rasa; He showers the rasa of pure bliss. We fail to experience Ananda unless and until we have an experience of the Ishwara. Apart from the eight rasas, it is only when the rasa of prema enters the heart, that the Maha Raas is created. We must surrender fully to Him – without a whiff of worldly distortions – for the Maha Raas to take place in our heart. When the gopis offered up all consideration of their Artha, Dharma, Kama and Moksha to Shri Krishna, that is when the Maha Raas took place, watched by the Devtas from above.

Shri Krishna was only eight years old when He did the Maha Raas. This shows His magnificence, and it also gives us the message that total surrender like the gopis of Vraja, is needed for participating in the Maha Raas. The sweet episode of Gopi Geet comes within the Maha Raas.

I am very happy to inform you that P. Maharajji will also be with us at Navaratri next year. Next year's topic is the Vana Bhoja. Shri Ramnivasji Jajoo is connected to this function. We always get his full cooperation. Shri Guptaaji of Jaishree Tea has organized this function with great skill. Shri Vinodji Mishra, manager of this Mandir, always extends his full support. The Hindustan Times has carried P. Girishanandji's messages to every household. All of you, who have great experiences, have come and added the offering of your presence for the Yagya of this katha.

We both thank you all. The Sikh Seva Jatha deserve our particular gratitude, for the praiseworthy service they render. Shri Maithili Sharanji, who was a disciple of Pujya Pundit Ramkinkarji, has been welcome for joining this Yagya. Lastly, I eulogize Pujya Shri Girishanandji Maharaj who has given us deep satisfaction through his unique rendering, and offer my respectful obeisance. Pranams from both of us.