

## My Humble Offering

by *Srila Bhakti Bibudha Bodhayan Goswami Maharaj*

*On 6th August 2017, the day before Balaram Purnima, this is my humble offering to our congregational members. It is my request to all of you to pray for me to the Supreme Lord, The Divine Couple, Sri Sri Radha Krishna through all the members of our lineage, to allow me to attain my ultimate goal of life—become an eternal servant of Sri Sri Radha Krishna. I am completely depending on the blessings of all devotees in order to fulfill this goal.*

*śrī-guru-caraṇa-padma, kevala-bhakati-sadma  
vando mui sāvadhāna mate*

In order for our devotional realization to blossom, we should remember the above verse, which is written by Srila Narottama Das Thakura Mahashaya. The inner meaning of this verse is discussed below.

The words *śrī guru* actually represent Srimati Radharani, the pleasure potency of Sri Krishna. Although, we sometimes say that Krishna is our ultimate *guru* or the universal teacher; in reality, the followers of Saraswata Gaudiya Vaishnavas believe, from the bottom of their hearts, that Srimati Radharani is our main *guru*.

The real nature of a *guru* is someone who teaches universally by example. According to Vaishnava tradition, a *guru* must be appointed by a previous *guru* or teacher who is a member of the recognized lineage. The need for a *guru* (spiritual master) to be connected to the recognized lineage is re-iterated in the *Padma Purana*, which states:

*samprdāya-vihīnā ye mantrās te viphalā matāḥ  
ataḥ kalau bhaviṣyanti catvāraḥ sampradāyinaḥ  
śrī-brahmā-rudra-sanakāḥ vaiṣṇavāḥ kṣiti-pāvanāḥ  
catvāras te kalau bhāvyaḥ hy utkale puruṣottamāt*

“The holy *mantra* that is received from a source outside of the proper disciplic succession, will never bear any fruit. This is why, in this age of Kali, four great souls will emerge and establish the four Vaishnava successions initiated by Sri (Lakshmi Devi), Brahma, Rudra (Lord Shiva) and the four Kumaras (Sanaka, Sanatana, Sanat and Sanandana). The four great leaders will each begin to manifest their authorized disciplic successions from the holy Dham of Puri.”

Originally, Sri Lakshmi Devi had given this sacred knowledge to Ramanujacarya; Lord Brahma to Sri Madhvacarya; Rudra to Visnu Swami; and the Four Kumaras to Nimbarkacarya. Being endowed with spiritual knowledge, they taught their disciples, and so the knowledge was transferred through disciplic successions. After some time, the Divine Couple Themselves combined in the form of Sri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu and appeared in this world to illuminate the Madhva sampradaya and to spread the

message of eternal love. Sriman Mahaprabhu was followed by numerous divine Spiritual Masters.

In the Madhvasampradaya, among the various jewel-like stalwart spiritual masters, a crown jewel emerged-Srila Prabhupada Bhaktisiddhanta Saraswati Thakur Prabhupada. Srila Prabhupada's illustrious contribution to the Vaishnava society is unparalleled. In addition to being initiated by Srila Gaurkisor Dasa Babaji Maharaja, Srila Prabhupada received special instructions and empowerment from the Lord Himself and various members of the spiritual lineage.

Once, after the disappearance of Srila Bhaktivinoda Thakura and Srila Gaurkisor Dasa Babaji Maharaja, Srila Prabhupada was grief stricken and feeling deep pangs of separation. He doubted whether he would be able to spread the message of Sri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu. At that time, a wonderful incident took place.

One night, Lord Gaursundara appeared in Srila Prabhupada's vision. With Him were the six Goswamis, Srila Jagannatha Dasa Babaji, Srila Bhaktivinoda Thakura and Srila Gaurkisor Dasa Babaji, all in their effulgent, transcendental forms. They collectively addressed Srila Prabhupada and asked him to give up all his doubts. They told him to go ahead with spreading the holy name and assured him that they would send suitable persons to support him. Srila Prabhupada Sarawati Thakur was thus appointed as *acharya* (spiritual master and leader) of the Brahma Madhva Gaudiya sampradaya.

As per their assurance, gradually, many qualified men came and became Srila Prabhupada's disciples. Srila Prabhupada would affectionately say that he is not accepting any disciples; instead he considered everyone like his *guru* in that they have all come to assist him in serving Krishna. In this way, Srila Prabhupada lovingly appointed all of his disciples as being qualified to fulfill the role of a *guru*. Just prior to his departure from this mortal world, he gave some essential instructions to all of his disciples. A number of them thus went on to establish their own preaching missions and initiate their own disciples. In this way the disciplic succession continued.

A bonafide *guru* who is teaching the spiritual path by example and who dedicates his life to the service of the Supreme Lord, is called an *ācārya* (acharya). Thus, Srimati Radharani should be regarded as the main *ācārya* in our lineage, as She is constantly showing us the most eloquent ways to please Sri Krishna with each of Her activities. The ultimate goal of our spiritual practice is to please the object of our service – the Supreme Personality of Godhead, Sri Krishna, with each and every thought and activity of our days. Srimati Radharani is the epitome of this. Lord Sri Krishna Himself certifies that without Her mercy no one can get His mercy. We can therefore conclude that Srimati Radharani is our ultimate *guru* and *ācārya*.

The next two words—*carana padma* refer to the *acharya's* lotus-feet. *carana* (pronounced cha-ra-na) means feet and *padma* means lotus. What is special about a lotus flower? The lotus is a beautiful, fragrant flower with high-quality, tasty nectar

inside the flower. By nature, a lotus flower opens its petals when the first rays of sunshine touch it in the morning, and then gradually closes its petals upon sunset. One can relish the sweet fragrance of lotus when petals are open, but when the petals are closed in a bud form, it is practically impossible to enjoy the fragrance or the nectar. Thus, the analogy indicated by the words *carana padma* is as follows: The grace of the *ācārya* is like the sun's rays that causes the lotus flower in our hearts to open and allows us to taste the nectar of spiritual practice.

When we are able to wholeheartedly carry out our lives according to the instruction of our Spiritual Master, at that point, we will be eligible to obtain his grace. Upon receiving the Spiritual Master's grace, we will gradually feel enthusiasm to follow our spiritual practice sincerely, allowing us to realize the blissful taste of this practice.

Allow me to now explain the inner meaning of the word *carana*, feet of the Spiritual Master. Firstly, as per the explanation above, please note that the spiritual master is a representative of Srimati Radharani; who is the pleasure potency of Lord Krishna and is non-different to Him. In this context, one may infer that the Spiritual Master is non-different from Lord Krishna. The word *carana* indicates the need for us to surrender unto Sri Sri Radha Krishna, through a spiritual master as well as the entire disciplic succession.

The importance of surrender cannot be sufficiently emphasized. It is the first step in devotional practice in order for us to achieve the main goal of our spiritual practice, i.e. *prema* (divine love) and bliss. Without surrender to the spiritual master, our entire devotional practice is in vain; there is no heart and soul in the practice. The spiritual master represents Radharani's mood of surrender to serve Lord Krishna.

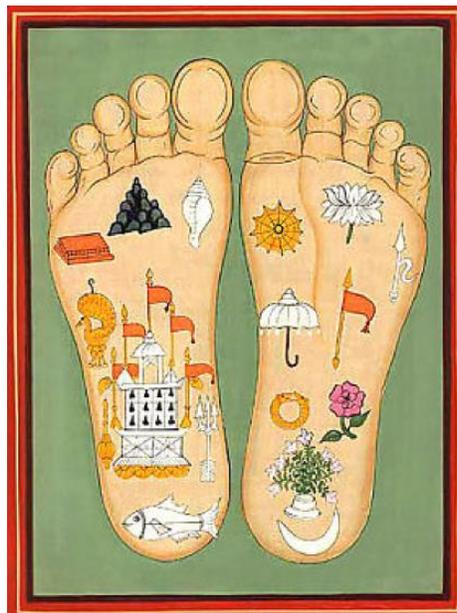
The sole purpose for us being in this material world, in this human form, is to serve Lord Krishna. As per the conversation between Sri Krishna Chaitanya Mahaprabhu and Srila Sanatana Goswami in Varanasi, all living beings are eternal servants of Lord Krishna. Lord Krishna has also confirmed that without Srimati Radharani's mercy, no one is eligible to get His mercy. Therefore, sincere surrender unto Srimati Radharani's feet is the only way to obtain the service of Lord Krishna.

Thereafter, Srila Narottam Thakur is using the Bengali three words—*kevala bhakti sadma*. The meaning of these three words is explained as follows: *kevala* means only; *bhakti* means pure-love; and *sadma* means eternal home. In short, we can say that our eternal home is at the feet of Srimati Radharani, embodiment of pure love only.

Let me explain the significance of Srimati Radharani's feet, which are adorned with the following 19 auspicious symbols:

Right Lotus Foot:  
8 Most Auspicious  
Marks

01. Sacrificial Altar
02. Mountain
03. Conch
04. Earring
05. Club
06. Chariot
07. Spear
08. Fish



Left Lotus Foot:  
11 Most  
Auspicious Marks

09. Barleycorn
10. Disc
11. Upcurving  
line
12. Lotus
13. Umbrella
14. Elephant  
Goad
15. Flag
16. Bracelet
17. Flower
18. Creeper
19. Half Moon

**1. Altar (*yagna-vedi*):** This mark proclaims that, for those who meditate upon Her feet, the consequences of their bad *karma* will burn up, as though on the altar of sacrifice.

From a different perspective, this symbol also indicates that the chanting of the Hare Krishna Mahamantra, whilst one's mind, heart, intelligence and consciousness is fixed on Srimati Radharani's feet, is like performing a *yagna* that stimulates universal nourishment. The universe is the form of Sri Krishna, and the offering is the form of Srimati Radharani. This perfect union is indicated by the mark of the sacrificial altar.

**2. Mountain:** This represents Govardhana hill (Giriraj), the best servant of Lord Hari (Haridasa-Varja). Giriraj always serves the feet of the Divine Couple, Sri Sri Radha Krishna. This symbol also declares that Sri Sri Radha Krishna give shelter to all pure devotees under Their lotus feet.

**3. Conch:** The symbol of the conch represents religious principles. Once we are able to observe religious principles from the bottom of our hearts, as prescribed by the scriptures (Haribhakti Vilas), then the Divine Couple, Sri Sri Radha Krishna, will rescue us from all sorts of distress.

Furthermore, the symbol indicates ultimate victory for devotees, since the conch shell mark on Their lotus feet contains the entire ocean of material existence, that may now be easily crossed over.

The mark is also symbolic of *jala-tattva* (the principle of pure water), since it was Sri Krishna's lotus feet that manifested the River Ganga, that is purifying the three worlds.

This symbol on Srimati Radharani's foot indicates the water-principle that soothes Her Beloved Krishna, so that He feels no burning pain when He is separated from Her company.

**4. Earring:** The earring indicates how Krishna's ears are always listening to the sweet tune and tinkling sound of Srimati Radharani's charming ankle-bells. Thus, He lives for the shelter of Her feet, which gives Him all happiness.

**5. Club (*gadā*):** This mark shows that Her feet are capable of chastising the mad elephant of sinful lust.

It further indicates that even the ancestors of one who wholeheartedly takes shelter of Her feet, will share in the benefit received from him practicing the path of devotion. As per scriptural evidence, 7 ancestral generations of a *kanishtha* (beginning level) devotee will be delivered; 14 generations of ancestors of a *madhyama* (middle level) devotee will be delivered and 21 generations of an *uttama* (highest level) devotee will be delivered.

**6. Chariot (*ratha*):** The chariot symbolizes the soul's physical form in the universe, with Their Feet being the direction in which all souls are to travel. It further indicates the immense mercy that the Lord has for His devotees, as He Himself becomes their charioteer. The Supreme goal may be easily attained, without impediments, when one travels on this chariot to the eternally blissful abode. Whoever sits on the chariot of Their lotus feet will be completely freed from all types of misery in this material world.

**7. Spear:** The spear (a long metal tipped weapon) indicates that for those who desire to be free from their present miserable conditions and who take shelter of the Divine Couple Sri Sri Radha Krishna, Their feet will immediately sever all mundane entanglements and difficulties.

**8. Fish:** The mark of the fish signifies that just as a fish cannot live without water, similarly, surrendered devotees cannot live a moment without direct association with Their lotus feet.

The symbol also indicates that Srimati Radharani is like a fish out of water and cannot live for a moment without Her beloved, Sri Krishna.

Another connotation of this symbol is to do with the mind. The mind is very fickle, just like a fish. As a fish is always moving this way and that, so too, our minds are very restless and disobedient. Only after extensive meditation and fervent endeavor, does the mind gradually reach the feet of Sri Sri Radha Krishna.

The fish further indicates that Their lotus feet will descend upon and reside in one's heart only if the heart has been purified by soft loving emotions (*rasa*) [the fish lives in *rasa* or water].

The fish symbol also appears on Sri Krishna's foot. It is the emblem found on the banner of Cupid, just to excite the desires of the *Vraja-gopīs*. This mark on Sri Krishna's foot demonstrates that He has conquered Cupid, and Cupid's flag of surrender is displayed on the soles of His feet. It also serves as a reminder that, during the great universal devastation and flood, Sri Krishna assumed the form of *matsya*, the fish incarnation, and thereby saved His devotees.

**9. Flower (*puṣpa*):** The flower mark is unique on Srimati Radharani's foot. It signifies that the divine fame of Her feet spreads everywhere, just like the fragrance of a sweetly-scented flower. It proclaims that Her Feet are not hard, but instead, are as soft as flower petals.

It is indicative that, just as a fruit grows only after the plant blooms, similarly, all spiritual fruits only come into being after having blossomed at the soles of Her feet.

**10. Barleycorn:** This mark reveals that Their devotees receive all enjoyable opulence and prosperity by serving Their lotus feet. It also demonstrates that once a devotee finds shelter at Their lotus feet, his former journey through millions of births and deaths is actually very tiny and insignificant, just like a single grain of barley.

Lastly, it shows that, just as barley grains are the sustenance of life for certain living beings, similarly, it is widely celebrated that Their glorious lotus feet are the nourishment of all souls.

**11. Disc (*cakra*):** The disc signifies the ability to conquer the special six enemies of our body as lust, anger, greed, illusion, pride and envy. This disc, like *sudarśan cakra*, will dispel our illusionary vision and open our auspicious vision, allowing us to free from the dark consequence of our bad *karma*.

On Srimati Radharani's foot, this symbol also shows that She is the ruler of Her own kingdom formed by the circle of *Vraja-mandala*.

**12. Up curving line:** This mark indicates that the steadfast devotion of a faithful devotee towards the lotus feet of Sri Sri Radha Krishna, steadily elevates him to the higher realms (Goloka Vrindavan). Indeed, he will never fall down from that realm. The line is showing that the activities of such a devotee are never to be doubted by anyone. He cannot be held captive within a small place- this material universe.

The symbol also indicates that the path to their lotus feet of Sri Sri Radha Krishna., being free from external designations, is very direct and that we are Their eternal servants. It further reveals that Their feet can extend down to the lowest, fallen souls and can deliver those who have taken shelter of Them wholeheartedly.

**13. Lotus:** This mark symbolizes that just as a beautiful lotus emerges from the water, similarly, the highest benefit is achieved by those whose eyes well up with tears upon holding the Divine Couple's lotus feet to their heart.

Just as a lotus consistently blooms by day and closes its petals by night, so too, those who remain fixed in meditation on Their lotus feet will certainly experience devotion blossoming and unfolding within their hearts, and all obstacles, hypocrisy and the darkness of ignorance will be completely removed from their path.

**14. Umbrella:** This marking indicates that those who take shelter of Her lotus feet are shielded from the incessant rainfall of material miseries. Her lotus feet also provide relief to Her beloved, Lord Krishna, from the scorching heat He feels in Her separation.

It also refers to Lord Krishna holding up Govardhana hill, like an umbrella, to protect Vraja from the devastating rainfall caused by the anger of Indra.

Lastly, it implies that those who take shelter of and are given refuge at Her lotus feet become exalted like maharajas (kings), who usually have umbrellas held over their heads.

**15. Bracelet:** Those who wholeheartedly take shelter of Srimati Radharani's lotus feet, will hear the sweet sound of Radharani's bracelet. In essence, this means that such persons will receive the rare and coveted opportunity to engage in intimate services and stay close to Srimati Radharani.

The bracelet also symbolizes chastity, those who wear the bracelet have developed full chastity. In this entire universe, Krishna is actually the only male, all others are female. If anyone desires to be a true servant of Sri Krishna with all their activities, they have to take shelter of Srimati Radharani and render services under Her personal guidance.

**16. Elephant goad:** This mark reveals that meditation on Their lotus feet brings the elephants of Their devotees' minds under control, and keeps them on the right path. It also indicates that those who stay on the path toward Their lotus feet, become superior to others, just as someone riding atop of an elephant is seated above those on foot.

This mark on the foot of Srimati Radharani indicates that, even though Lord Krishna's elephant-like mind may attempt to behave heroically, Her lotus feet are still powerful enough to easily conquer Him and bring Him under Her control.

**17. Flag:** This mark announces that for the devotees who are meditating on Her lotus feet, Her feet provide them with unprecedented security and protection from all sorts of fear. It further indicates that there will be supreme victory for all the *gopīs* who are aware of the glories of Her lotus feet.

**18. Creeper:** This symbol represents the journey of an ardent devotee, and how the desire-creeper in the devotee's heart grows over time and gradually seeks permanent shelter at Her lotus feet.

It also shows that Her lotus feet are always found in the forests of Vrindavan, that abounds with groves and vine-laden bower-houses.

Srimati Radharani Herself is like a creeper that is wrapping itself around the tamala tree that is Lord Krishna.

Lastly, an intelligent person grabs hold of Her lotus feet, just as a creeper firmly grasps whatever it is ascending.

**19. Half-moon:** This symbol represents how Her lotus feet truly fulfill the desires of devotees and help them achieve their objectives. Just as the moon showers nectar with its cooling rays, similarly, the lotus feet of Srimati Radharani and Sri Krishna shower nectar upon Their devotees, extinguishing the three-fold material miseries (i.e. miseries caused by body and mind, miseries caused by other living entities and miseries caused by natural calamities).

Just as the half-moon is in the process of growing, so too, the *sukṛti* of one who incessantly glorifies Their lotus feet in a flawless manner, continually increases.

The 19 symbols described above are testament to the fact that Srimati Radharani is the sole, everlasting and blissful refuge for all sincere souls.

Vrindavan is the eternally blissful abode of our Divine Couple, Sri Sri Radha Krishna. In Vrindavan, Lord Krishna resides with Srimati Radharani eternally. Srimati Radharani is the embodiment of Krishna's loving services, and is non-different to Him.

From the above explanation, it is evident that a spiritual master should teach his disciple how to establish a relationship with Srimati Radharani. The spiritual master can therefore be seen as a representative of Srimati Radharani.

To teach us the necessity of a spiritual master in order to make spiritual advancement, Srila Narottama Das Thakur once said:

*guru kṛpāy kṛṣṇa mile, kṛṣṇa kṛpāy guru mile*

“We can obtain a bonafide *guru* by the grace of Krishna; and then by the grace of *guru* we can reach Krishna.”

Nowadays, to our great dismay, the initiation process is often compromised. Instead of sincerely praying to Lord Krishna from the bottom of their hearts to lead them to a bonafide *guru*, most people are selecting their spiritual master through some professional agent of a spiritual society or according to their own intelligence or speculation. As a result, we see that most initiated devotees frequently change their spiritual master, opening themselves up to risk of committing offense to Vaishnava.

To make us understand the procedure by which we should accept a spiritual master, Srila Narottam Das Thakur composed the second line in his song:

*vando mui sāvadhāna mate*

Here *vando* means pray; *mui* means I or we; *sāvadhāna* means carefully and *mate* means proper understanding. The essence of this line is that we should ardently pray to Krishna—from the bottom of our heart; not merely superficially—in order for Him to send us His perfect representative—a spiritual master, who can teach us by example, how to become an eternal servant of Srimati Radharani. As soon as we are able to develop a resolute determination to become an eternal servant of Srimati Radharani, Lord Krishna Himself will choose a perfect initiating spiritual master and send him to us. Such a spiritual master will have been appointed by a previous *ācārya* in the spiritual lineage, will be properly qualified to carry all the duties of a *guru*, and will be like-minded to support our spiritual journey.

Following the above explanation of how to choose a spiritual master, I am most fortunate to have experienced in my own life how Lord Krishna is most merciful in that my beloved spiritual master possessed all the qualities of an exemplary *ācārya*.

I am continually praying to Lord Krishna to create an environment in the present society by which everyone may have sufficient strength to pray for, and to receive a suitable and like-minded spiritual master, who can gradually elevate him to become an actual servant of Srimati Radharani.

I am also praying to the Lord to keep the Vaishnava community free from quarrels over matters relating to *guru* and to help us establish the main goal of Sri Krishna Chaitanya Mahaprabhu's loving mission, through a non-sectarian, non-judgmental mood in our community.

An unworthy servant of Sri Krishna Chaitanya Mahaprabhu's Mission.

B.B. Bodhayan