

THE VALLABHACHARYA LINEAGE

Shri Gusainji writes in his Sarvottam Stotra, a praise to his father Shri Vallabhacharya, "He created His own family lineage to promote devotion in the world. He is a father and has established his unlimited greatness in His own lineage."

There are two types of guru-disciple lineages; *bindu* and *nada*. The *nada* lineages pass on their successorship from guru to disciple. The guru chooses one of his disciples to take over his position after his death. In the *bindu* lineage, successorship is from father to son. The Path of Grace is a *bindu* lineage. All past and present day lineage-holders in the Path of Grace are direct descendants from Shri Gusainji and his seven sons, Shri Girdharji, Shri Govindji, Shri Bal Krishnaji, Shri Gokulnathji, Shri Raghunathji, Shri Yadunathji and Shri Ghan Shyamji.

Shri Vitthalnathji's first wife, Shri Rukminiji, gave birth to six sons. Her eldest son, Shri Girdharji was born in 1540 AD in Adel. He married Bhaminiji and had three sons. He was known in Akbar's court as Jati and the town of Jatipura is named after him. He loved solitude and often spent his time in a cave in Kamar, in a remote part of Braja. He was a great scholar and worshipped Shri Krishna in his forms of Shri Nathji, Shri Navanita Priyaji as well as Shri Mathureshji. He left this world by entering into the divine mouth of Shri Mathureshji when the blessed Lord yawned.

Shri Vitthalnathji's second son, Shri Govindji, was born in 1542 AD. He married Shri Rani and had four sons. He

worshipped Shri Krishna in the form of Shri Vitthalnathji and was so attached to Shri Krishna's blessed worship, that during his marriage ceremony, he felt such separation from his Lord that the ceremony had to be interrupted so he could finish Shri Vitthalnathji's evening worship.

Shri Vitthalnathji's third son, Shri Bal Krishnaji was born in 1549 AD. He was robust, swarthy and had large lotus-like eyes. At home he was called "Lotus-Eyed one". After his studies, he married Shri Kamalavati and had six sons and one daughter. He worshipped Shri Krishna in his form as Shri Dwarkadish. He spent many years of his life in Gokul. One night he had the darshan of Shri Yamunaji and vowed he would not drink water until he found a Radha Svarupa for his Shri Dwarkadish. Knowing of his vow, Shri Vitthalnathji gave him a pair of golden bangles and told him, "These golden bangles will perfectly fit the Radha Deity that you are so eagerly looking for."

Shri Bal Krishnaji then wandered around Braja until he found his Radha Deity and established Her into Shri Dwarkadish's seva. Whenever he worshipped Shri Dwarkadish, he remained in a divine state of bhava. Once while he was worshipping Child Krishna in a cradle, he became so full of devotion that Child Krishna actually came and sat in his lap. Shri Bal Krishnaji was a great scholar and wrote many works in Sanskrit.

Shri Vitthalnathji's fourth son was the well-known Shri Gokulnathji. He was born in 1551AD and married Shri Parvatiji. He had three sons and a daughter. He worshipped Shri Krishna in His form of Shri Gokulnathji, a four-armed golden Krishna. Shri Gokulnathji was very famous and composed wonderful literature in Braja Bhasa and Sanskrit. The 84 and 252 Vaishnava Accounts were given to us by Shri Gokulnathji. Today, there are millions of people who continue to worship Shri Gokulnathji. There are many books

full of his stories and teachings that have been recorded by his followers. He had great respect for his elder brothers.

Once when someone stole his youngest brother's Krishna svarupa, Madan Mohanji, Shri Gokulnathji vowed, "Whoever stole my brother's Krishna, their lineage will not continue."

When someone mentioned to him, "What if it is your own son?"

Shri Gokulnathji exclaimed, "Then my lineage will not continue."

It so happened that it was his own son that did the deed and because of Shri Gokulnathji's curse, for many generations, there were no sons born into his line and very often an Acharya had to be adopted into the fourth seat.

In a well-recorded incident, a *sanyasi* by the name of Chidrupa convinced Emperor Jahangir to stop all bhaktas from wearing *tulasi* necklaces and tilaks. Shri Gokulnathji then went to his summer palace in Kashmir and eventually convinced the ruler to remove the edict.

Shri Vitthalnathji's fifth son, Shri Raghunathji, was born in 1554 AD in Adel. When Shri Raghunathji was just five years old, while Shri Gusainji was absorbed in Shri Nathji's seva, he asked his young son in Sanskrit for the jewellery box. At first, Shri Raghunathji did not understand his father's words, but then with the grace of Shri Mahaprabhuji, he finally understood what his father wanted and brought him the jewellery box. From that day on, Shri Vitthalnathji decided that in seva, they would speak the local tongue of Braja Bhasa, Shri Krishna's language instead of Sanskrit. Shri Raghunathji married Shri Janaki in Gokul when he was fifteen and had five sons and one daughter. He was given Shri Gokul Chandramaji for his personal worship.

In the morning, he would only open his eyes when he could see his father's face. While he was going into his father's

rooms with his eyes closed one morning, he bumped into something and hurt himself. Shri Gusainji then painted for him a self-portrait so that he could easily see his face when he got up every morning.

Shri Yadunathji, Shri Vitthalnathji's sixth son, was born in 1558 AD. He was an expert in Ayurveda. He married Maharani in Gokul when he was about fifteen years old and had five sons and one daughter. His father presented him with a small Child Krishna for his personal worship. He put his Child Krishna with his older brother's Shri Dwakadish Svarupa and they all worshipped together.

Shri Ghan Shyamji, Shri Vitthalnathji youngest son, was born in 1571 through his second wife, Shri Padmavatiji. She died young so Shri Ghanshyam was raised by Shri Girdharji's wife, Shri Bhamini. Shri Gusainji blessed her so that her lineage would always continue and to this day, the line of Shri Bhamini and Yadunathji are the two lineages that have survived. All the other lineages had to at some point adopt Acharyas into their family. Shri Ghan Shyam worshipped Shri Madan Mohanji and married Krishnavati. They had two sons and a daughter. Shri Ghan Shyam composed literature in Braja Bhasa and Sanskrit.

Shri Harirayaji, the grandson of Shri Gusainji's second son Shri Govindji was a prolific writer and a major teacher of The Path of Grace. He was born in Gokul in 1647. His father was Shri Kalyanrayaji and Shri Gusainji's blessing over him manifested in his son, Shri Harirayaji who became known as Mahaprabhu. Shri Harirayaji took initiation from Shri Gokulnathji when he was eight years old and learned the *seva* and teachings of the lineage from him. When there was disturbance from local Muslim rule, Shri Harirayaji moved to Kimnor in Rajasthan just outside of Shri Nathdvara. Shri Harirayaji was a very humble being who had many direct experiences of Shri Nathji. It is recorded

that if there were ever any mistakes in Shri Nathji's seva, Shri Nathji would appear to Shri Harirayaji and then Shri Harirayaji would travel to Shri Nathji's temple and correct whatever mistake was made in the blessed worship.

Bhaktas came from distant parts of India to hear Shri Harirayaji's teachings and would often become so inspired by hearing his words that they would start to sing and dance. Shri Harirayaji lived for about 125 years and composed an amazing ocean of devotional literature that enriched the devotional forms of the Path of Grace. He had four sons. His famous teaching, the Shiksha Patra, contains forty-one letters of grace-filled instructions that he wrote to his younger brother Shri Gopeshvarji. They hold the essence of the Path. Those letters as well as Shri Gopeshvarji's commentaries on them are recited daily in the assembly of bhaktas. Also, Shri Harirayaji's commentary on the 252 and 84 Vaishnavas contains the foundations of the lineage teachings and shed light on the meaning of the bhaktas' life stories as well as on the teachings of the Path of Grace.

Shri Harirayaji's extensive literature covers every topic of the Path of Grace. He wrote in Braja Bhasa, Panjabi, Gujarati and Maravadi as well as Sanskrit. He gave importance to experiencing *bhava* for the Blessed Lord. His wife Sundarvanta also composed literature in Braja Bhasa and Gujarati. Shri Harirayaji was the elan of the lineage and without looking at his writings, one cannot truly understand the Path of Grace.

Another amazing personality in the Path of Grace was Shri Goswami Purushottamji Maharaja. He was born in 1724. When he was six years old, after reciting the 108 names of Shri Vallabhacharya, Shri Mahaprabhu Vallabhacharya appeared before him and gave him the gift of wisdom. Shri Purushottamji is believed to have written some 900,000 works. He was a master of all scriptures and lineages and

wandered around India with bullock carts full of books. He discussed scriptures with pundits wherever he went and could never be defeated. Later in his life, he moved to Surat where he worshipped Bal Krishnaji. He left his body in his birthplace, Gokul.

Shri Vallabhacharya's direct lineage is considered to be divine. He has written in his teaching, "The Paths of Grace, Mundane Flow and Law", "The creation of grace-filled souls is strictly for the loving service of the Blessed Blissful Lord and there is no remarkable difference between the Lord's form, avatar, the markings on His body, His virtues and the bhakta's souls, bodies and actions."

This teaching applies to his lineage as well as to his followers. The Vallabhacharya lineage has been full of incarnated enlightened beings and their contributions to the bhakti teachings, music and general grace-filled lifestyle have been enormous. In accordance with Shri Vallabhacharya's pure non-dualist system that views the world as full of Shri Krishna, the Vallabh lineage clearly contains Shri Krishna's essence. We find many stories about bhaktas who have seen the various forms of Shri Krishna in Shri Vallabhacharya and his descendants.

The lineage-holders give initiation to the followers of the Path of Grace and establish Shri Krishna's seva in their homes. They also transmit the sacred teachings of the lineage. To this day the lineage-holders of Shri Vallabhacharya are poets, pundits, musicians, sanskritists, as well as experts in Vedant. Their greatest virtue is their attachment to Shri Krishna's seva. They follow in the footsteps of Shri Vallabhacharya who called himself a "Krishnadas", a devout follower of Shri Krishna.

To understand the pulse of the lineage, I feel that it is necessary to have contact and teachings directly from the lineage-holders. They hold, in their blood and hearts the

necessary empowerments for understanding the nature of grace and God. There is also diversity in the different lineage-holders and this has created innovations in worship and outlook as well as from time to time, difference in opinions. Shri Vallabhacharya's family contributions to the devotional dharma truly have no peer. They have maintained the bhakti spirit of Shri Vallabhacharya and have passed it on to other bhaktas, creating divine awareness for eighteen generations.

The homes of lineage-holders are abodes of Shri Krishna's worship. The lineage-holders are affectionately called *balaks*, or children, reflecting their pure and innocent natures. On a personal note, my entrance and education in the Path of Grace was due to the graceful kindness of His Holiness Goswami Prathameshji Maharaja. He was the head of the first seat and embodied the lineage within his being. His forefathers were all steeped in the modes of seva and teachings and to find a guru with such spiritual expertise was for me a rare gift. It was my good fortune that I came into contact with His Holiness. My debt remains to the entire lineage of Shri Vallabhacharya as well as to the followers.