

THE TEMPLE OF THE HEART

Five Paths to the Temple of the Heart

PAÑCĀNGA BHAKTI – FIVE PATHS LEADING TO THE TEMPLE OF THE HEART



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| 1. <i>sādhu-saṅga</i> | association with devotees |
| 2. <i>nāma-kīrtana</i> | chanting the holy name of the Lord |
| 3. <i>bhāgavata-śravaṇa</i> | hearing <i>Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam</i> |
| 4. <i>mathurā-vāsa</i> | residing at Mathurā |
| 5. <i>śrī-mūrtira śraddhāya sevana</i> | worshipping the deity |

MATHURĀ-VĀSA

This Amṛta Vāṇī training letter series focuses on practices (*upāyas*) that lead us into the sacred space of our own heart. The practice we will discuss here is *dhāma-sevā*, service to holy places of pilgrimage.

In the old days, souls who decided to leave their old life behind and begin earnest Kṛṣṇa consciousness went to a place where Kṛṣṇa performed His pastimes. The following verse describes the feelings of someone who has fully surrendered to Kṛṣṇa. Such a soul always thinks of Kṛṣṇa and feels drawn to change his or her life so he or she can live in a holy place.

*tavāsmīti vadan vācā
tathaiva manasā vidan
tat-sthānam āśritas tanvā
modate śaraṇāgataḥ*

One whose body is fully surrendered takes shelter at the holy place where Kṛṣṇa had His pastimes, and he prays to the Lord, “My Lord, I am Yours.” Understanding this with his mind, he enjoys spiritual bliss.

(Śrī Caitanya-caritāmṛta, Madhya 22.101)



A HOLY PLACE IS NONMATERIAL

A holy place (*dhāma*) on this planet is not part of this world. Rather, it is an earthly manifestation of the transcendental kingdom where Kṛṣṇa eternally resides. Just as a lotus flower stands above the water and never touches it, a *dhāma* stands above the earth. When you go to a holy place you can feel the place is not from here; it's from Kṛṣṇa's own planet. In his *Nectar of Devotion* (chapter 13) Śrīla Prabhupāda writes that even a nondevotee can feel this.

There are different levels on which we can see a pilgrimage place. On the *ādhibhautika* level we simply see the material elements – the dust, trees, rivers, and hills. This is a material or external vision of the *dhāma*. If we look at the *dhāma* only with these eyes, we will mistake the *dhāma* for a material place. But a holy place cannot actually be seen with material eyes.

On the *ādhyātmika* level we consider the holy *dhāma* to be a place of tremendous energy, a place of power. And on the *ādhidevika* level we see it as nondifferent from Kṛṣṇa.

However, even if you come to a holy place with material vision, if you avoid committing offenses while you're there, the holy place will transform you. Śrīla Rūpa Gosvāmī describes the power of residing in Mathurā:

The splendor of Mathurā's forest made beautiful by being situated on the bank of the Yamnuā, where buzzing bees take shelter of newly blooming kadamba trees, ornamented with unlimited sweetness, produces an extraordinary state of bhāva in my mind.

(*Bhakti-rasāmṛta-sindhu*, 1.2.243)



By the power of the *dhāma* an extraordinary state is created in the mind. Śrīla Jīva Gosvāmī comments that this loving ecstasy is directed without fail toward Kṛṣṇa. If you don't commit offenses, your mind will automatically run toward Kṛṣṇa in Vṛndāvana.

MENTAL RESIDENCE IN A HOLY PLACE

What if we cannot reside in a *dhāma*? There is a miracle related to holy places: we can reside in them by going to them in our mind. Śrīla Prabhupāda explains this in the *Nectar of Devotion* (chapter 16): "If it is not possible, however, to be physically present at Vṛndāvana, one can meditate anywhere upon living in that situation."

In the *Śrī Vṛndāvana Mahimāmṛta* it is stated, "If one lives in the earthly land of Vṛndāvana, touches it, sees it, travels to it, meditates upon it, bows down to offer respects to it, sings or hears about its glorious qualities, carries its dust on one's head or has any relationship with it, then this purifying earthly Vṛndāvana will carry him to the supreme abode of Vṛndāvana in the spiritual world."

This verse shows that by touching Vṛndāvana mentally you can attain the same result as by traveling there. Vṛndāvana is wherever you think of Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa! You only have to leave your material consciousness, the *ādhibhautika* level, which is dictated by the perception of only the five elements, and enter sacred space on the spiritual level. Then you can be in Vṛndāvana even while living elsewhere. Śrīla Prabhupāda was like this. He wrote, "Although I am presently living in America, my residence is in Vṛndāvana because I am always thinking of Kṛṣṇa. Although I may be in a New York apartment, my consciousness is there, and this is as good as being there." (*Path of Perfection*, chapter 9).

❖❖❖❖ TIPS FOR PILGRIMAGES TO HOLY PLACES ❖❖❖❖

(Both Mental and Physical Ones)

• Avoid the following offenses to the *dhāma*. Offenses are obstacles that block the road to the *dhāma*.

- 1) To show contempt or disrespect to the spiritual master who reveals the *dhāma* to you.
- 2) To have a material concept of the *dhāma* and think it a place like any other material place.
- 3) To commit violence toward any of the people or pilgrims residing in the *dhāma*, or to think of them as ordinary people.
- 4) To perform mundane activities while living in the *dhāma*.
- 5) To earn money by, and make a business of, deity worship and chanting the holy name.
- 6) To think that the holy *dhāma* belongs to some mundane country or province such as Uttar Pradesh or Bengal, or to think the Lord's *dhāma* is equal to a holy place connected with a demigod, or to attempt to measure the area of the *dhāma*.
- 7) To commit sinful acts while in the *dhāma*.
- 8) To consider Vṛndāvana and Navadvīpa different.
- 9) To blaspheme the *śāstras* that glorify the holy *dhāma*.
- 10) To be faithless and think the glories of the *dhāma* imaginary.



- Pray to become free of all the offenses you have committed knowingly or unknowingly during your long stay in the material realm. Turn to Kṛṣṇa and pray: “O Kṛṣṇa, I have forgotten you for so many long years and done so many foolish things. Please free me from this mentality and make me a devotee.”
- Be careful in your dealings with the *dhāma*'s residents. Don't become angry with them under any circumstances. Pay your obeisances to all the creatures (moving and nonmoving) who reside in the *dhāma*.
- Don't think of mundane things or do mundane activities while in the *dhāma*.
- Practice humility.
- Behave properly, and don't break the regulative principles in the *dhāma*.
- Feel like a servant. You are now in your master's land.
- Chant the names of the Lord.
- While in Śrī Vṛndāvana-dhāma:
 - Remain aware of the power of the dust of Vṛndāvana. It has been touched by the lotus feet of Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa and is a powerful medicine to cure the disease of material life. Roll in it and cover your body with it!
 - Pay your obeisances and pray to the five persons who reveal Śrī Vṛndāvana-dhāma to you: the dust of Vṛndāvana, Vṛndādevī, Pūrṇamāsī, Gopeśvara Mahādeva, and Yamunādevī.

