

## Granth - Ashtakshar Mantra

The *ashtakshar* mantra is one of the two mantras which are given to Vaishnavs at the time of their *Bramhasabandh* which unite them to Shri Krishna and act as the initiation ceremony within Pushtimarg. The word *ashta* (eight) *akshar* (syllable) mantra refers to the 'Shri Krishna Sharanam Mama' mantra which translates to 'Shri Krishna is my refuge/shelter'. This mantra is one of the main mantras in Pushtimarg and Vaishnavs are prescribed to chant it daily by Shri Mahaprabhuji.



### Prakatya (manifestation) of the Ashtakshar

The *ashtakshar* mantra was manifested within *Golok Dham* (Shri Krishna's abode). Once Shri Krishna and Shri Radha both were performing the *leela* (act) of *maan* (loving stubbornness towards one another) in which they were sitting separately and not speaking to each other. From the fire of separation between them and their desire to unite again Shri Mahaprabhuji appeared and approached Shri Radha and escorted Her towards Shri Krishna. At the moment when they were reunited in ecstatic joy Shri Mahaprabhuji pronounced 'Shri Krishna Sharanam Mama' and took refuge of both Shri Krishna and Shri Radha. Shri Mahaprabhuji then took this mantra to earth for the upliftment of all divine souls.

### Significance of the Ashtakshar

Shri Gusainji revealed that each syllable of the *ashtakshar* mantra has its own significance:

#### **Shri**

**Shri:** Shri refers to Lakshmi or wealth. The chanting of the *ashtakshar* can lead to wealth which is used in Shri Thakorji's Seva. The reason that the provision for wealth has been made in the *ashtakshar* is that Vaishnavs have no desire for wealth themselves, however, still require it to do Shri Thakorji's Seva - thus it can be amassed without effort through the chanting of the *ashtakshar* in order to ensure the continuation of Shri Thakorji's seva.

#### **Krushna**

**Kru:** The syllable 'kru' absolves the soul of any sins it has committed through the body, speech, or mind. The *ashtakshar* simplifies the removal of sins which is usually challenging and involves the undergoing of much physical strain according to scripture. This makes it easier for an individual to enter the seva of Shri Thakorji free from all their flaws.

**Shna:** This syllable removes three types of suffering known as '*trivid taap*'. These three types of suffering are 1) *Adibhautik*: inflicted by other living entities, 2) *Adhyatmik*: inflicted by the body and mind itself, and 3) *Adhidaivik*: inflicted by one's environment. Through being relieved from these sufferings an individual becomes purified and can surrender to Shri Krishna.

#### **Sharanam**

**Sha:** Through the pronunciation of this syllable, one is liberated from the cycle of death and birth and moving through the different eighty-four thousand species. One is also liberated from egotism and attachment which allows a Vaishnav to attain Shri Krishna.

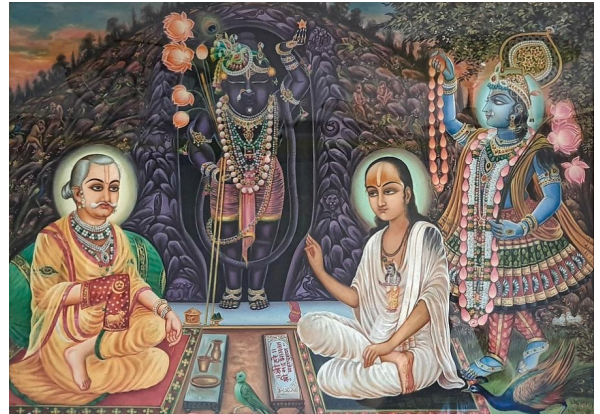
**Ra:** The syllable 'ra' allows for the attainment of divine knowledge about Shri Krishna and the true nature of reality is accessed.

**Nam:** The pronunciation of this syllable bestows complete and eternal devotion on the believer who now holds firm and unwavering love for Shri Krishna. Love for Shri Krishna grows through His grace.

#### **Mama**

**Ma:** The syllable 'ma' bestows eternal love for the Guru, Shri Vallabh. The Guru is necessary to understand Shri Krishna and to develop love towards Him as the Guru bridges the gap between the individual soul and Shri Krishna.

**Ma:** This syllable represents becoming engrossed in love and devotion for Shri Krishna. This is considered to be a type of *mukti* or liberation known as *saiyuja mukti* which is considered to be superior to *moksha* (liberation from the cycle of birth and death).



Another benefit of the *ashtakshar* mantra as revealed by Shri Mahaprabhuji is the removal of all anxieties. Shri Mahaprabhuji, in the Navratnam Stotra, is writing to console the anxieties of a Vaishnav and He concludes that the most supreme way in which a Vaishnav can become free of anxiety is through '*tasmaate sarvatemana nityam, Shri Krushna Sharanam Mama*' - recite, with devotion at all times 'Shri Krushna Sharanam Mama'.

### Process of Chanting the Ashtakshar

The *ashtakshar* mantra can be always chanted and in all circumstances. Therefore, Vaishnavs should attempt to constantly repeat the mantra in their mind throughout the day



and in all tasks to keep their mind engrossed within Shri Krishna. Additionally, the *ashtakshar* mantra can be recited using a *Tulsi mala* of 108 beads which is turned inside of a *gaumukhi* which is a cloth covering the *mala* and one's hand. Whilst chanting on a *Tulsi mala* one can envision Shri Krishna's *swaroop* (form) and focus on each part of the *swaroop* from His *Shri Charanarvind* (lotus feet) to the *Shri Mukharvind* (lotus face) and develop a love for Shri Krishna's name and form.

## Utsav - Dolotsav

Dolotsav takes place on the day after Holi and is considered as a *Mahamahotsav* in Pushtimarg (one of the most important festivals). For 40 days preceding Dolotsav Holi is played with Shri Thakorji every day in seva, and Dolotsav marks the grand culmination of Holi for the year. The word Dol refers to a swing.

The 'Dol' (swing) is decorated with flowers and leaves on which Shri Thakorji and Shri Swaminiji are swung whilst coloured water and coloured powders such as *abil* and *gula* are thrown onto the divine Couple and amongst each other. This festival was first performed in Jaggannath Puri and then according to the wishes of Shri Thakorji it was incorporated into Pushtimarg.

Shree Harirai Mahaprabhuji expounded the *bhavna* (emotion) behind Dolotsav. He wrote that Dolotsav is performed by Shri Vrishbhanuji (the father of Shri Radha) and Shri Kirtiji (Shri Radha's mother) who invite their son-in-law to play Holi on the Dol and it is also performed at *Nandalay* (Shri Krishna's home). Thirdly, Dol takes place with the Gopis in their *Nikunj* (gardens). Shree Yashodaji orders the Gopis to play Holi so much with Shri Krishna that He no longer wants to play anymore, thus marking the end of the Holi season. Therefore, Dolotsav is done out of both the love of the Gopis and the love of a parent. The Dol is intended to signify how Shri Krishna eternally swings in the heart of his devotees, and the reason it is decorated with foliage is that Shri Krishna accepts the service of the trees, plants and flowers which decorate the swing. The Dol can be located in four different places: within the Govardhan mountain, within the Kunj, within Shrimad Gokul and on the banks of the Yamuna.



On this day, whilst Shri Thakorji swings in the Dol during Rajbhog Darshan (the afternoon darshan) He is offered four *bhogs* (food offerings) and four complimentary *khels* (playing with colours) and then Shri Thakorji gives *darshan*. Each *khel* grows in its intensity with more and more colour being sprayed on the *swaroop* of Shri Thakorji, then the Dol and then the *pichwai* (cloth hung behind Shri Thakorji). This increase in the intensity of the *khel* corresponds to how much *bhog* is served to Shri Thakorji. The four different *khels* have been understood to symbolise Shri Thakorji playing Holi with the four different types of *bhaktas* (devotees) - *nirgun*, *saatvik*, *rajas* and *tamas*. After Shri Thakorji is then cleaned with an *angavastra*, (cloth used for cleaning Shri Thakorji's body), His *shringar* (ornaments) are changed and after His siesta, He gives Darshan to His Vaishnavs again.

In Nathdwara on this day, a person dressed as a Mughal king circumambulates the temple and sweeps the steps of the Mandir with his beard. This act reenacts the legend of the Mughal Emperor Aurangzeb who is said to have come to Nathdwara to loot more riches however became blind as soon as he reached the threshold. Then in atonement swept the nine steps of the Mandir and miraculously regained his sight. Therefore, this is commemorated on the day of Dolotsav in Nathdwara.



### Kirtan

Giridharana jhulavata bala dol jhulata he  
Nirakha nirakha phulata Lalitadika  
Shri Radhavar Nandalala  
Dol jhulata he ||1||

*Giridhar pushes the Dol and the maiden's swing  
Her eyes on this sight, Lalita finds pleasure.  
That this husband of Radha, this son of Nand  
Pleases the maidens of Vraj ||1||*

Chova chandan chirakata bhamini udata Abir-gulal  
Kamal-nayan ko paan khavavata Peharave uramala  
Dol jhulata he ||2||

*Swaminiji sprinkles Choha and Chandan  
Abir-gulal colour the air  
Then she feeds paan to her lotus-eyed lover,  
Adorning him with a garland ||2||*

Vajata tala mridang adhoti kujata venu rasala  
Nandadasa yuvati mila gavat rijhavata Shri Gopala  
Dol jhulata he Giridharana jhulavat bala ||3||

*Mridang plays, flute echoes  
Nanddas says,  
'The maidens of Vraj have come together to sing.  
To sing and to please Gopal' ||3||*



## Tirth - Nathdwara

Nathdwara is a town located in Rajasthan, India.

It is a very significant spiritual location because Shrinathji Himself resides here:



The story behind Nathdwara goes back to *Dwaparyug* (third yuga cycle), when Shri Krishna was leaving for Mathura with Akroorji, Yashodaji asked Shri Krishna, what she would do without Him as she was completely attached and devoted to Him. Shri Krishna then asked her which is her favourite *leela* (episode) that he had performed - she responded that the *Govardhan Leela* was her favourite. Hence, He created *Govardhan Leela Swaroop* (Divine form of the Govardhan episode) of Himself for Shri Yashoda Maiya. Yashodaji would then do the *seva* of this *Swaroop* in order to remain connected to her beloved Shri Krishna whilst He remained in Mathura. After the end of Shri Krishna's *Dwapar Leela*, this *Swaroop* was immersed in a cavity within the *Govardhan Parvat* (Mountain in present-day Vraj, Uttar Pradesh, India).



Then in *Kaliyug* (fourth and present yuga cycle) in the 15th century, this *Swaroop* reappeared from the *Govardhan Parvat* whom we today address as our beloved Shrinathji. This *Swaroop* of Shrinathji was fully revealed when Shri Mahaprabhuji went to the *Govardhan Parvat*, in which Shri Mahaprabhuji and Shrinathji met for the first time, thus this incident is popularly known as the 'Pratham Milan' (first meeting). Shri Mahaprabhuji then built the temple of Shrinathji on *Govardhan* and started the *seva kram* (service). Later, Aurangzeb ordered the destruction of the temple of Shrinathji. At that time, Shrinathji's *seva* was being done by Govindji and Shrinathji came in the dream of Govindji as Laal Girdhariji and informed him not to worry as this situation has been created by Shrinathji Himself and that on Sharad Purnima, Shrinathji will be leaving for Mewar (Present day Rajasthan, India). Shrinathji will indicate where He wanted to stop through making the wheel of the cart stuck in the ground and unable to move any further.

Govindji left with Shrinathji in a *rath* (carriage) after *Shayan Aarti* and then after traveling for a few months, the *rath* finally halted at Nathdwara, outside *Ajab Kuwari's Mehel* (palace). *Ajab Kuwari* was an ardent devotee of Shrinathji and Shrinathji used to travel from Vraj to spend time with *Ajab Kuwari*, when on her request, Shrinathji had also promised her to come and stay at her palace forever. When Shrinathji arrived at Nathdwara to stay, *Ajab Kuwari* was 135 years old and ran with happiness towards Shrinathji. King *Rajsinghji* of Mewar, at that time, facilitated the building of the temple around *Ajab Kuwari's* palace. It was built by *Goswami Damodardas Bairagi* in 1672 CE. The present-day *Nij mandir* (inner sanctum) is *Ajab Kuwari's* room.

Since that day, even now, Shrinathji resides in Nathdwara. The doors of the inner sanctum are opened 8 times for the devotees to do *Darshan* (auspicious sight). These *darshans* of Shrinathji are *Mangla* (breakfast), *Shringar* (dressing with a variety of clothes, flowers, and jewels), *Gwal* (taking the cows to field), *Rajbhog* (lunch), *Uthapan* (afternoon rest), *Bhog Darshan* (light meal), *Sandhya Arti* (bringing the cows back home) and *Shayan* (going to bed). In winter, Shrinathji is fully covered and adorned with winter clothes whereas in summer, Shrinathji is adorned with cotton comfortable clothes. Also, Shrinathji gives *Shayan Darshan* at *Girirajji* instead of Nathdwara for six months. One must do each of these *darshans* when visiting Nathdwara.

Outside the main inner sanctum is the *Kamal Chowk*, where Shri *Thakorji* used to play with *Ajab Kuwari*. The temple of *Navneet Priyaji* is also in the premises of the main temple. The form of *Thakorji* here appears in a *baal-swaroop* (infant form) known as *Navneet Priyaji* which means the One who loves freshly churned butter. The *seva* is also done like that of a newly born child. There is also *Moti Mahal* (residence palace of the *Vallabhkul*), *Prasadghar* (blessed food store) and *Sevaghar* (service House) in the temple.



Structurally, the *Kalash* (pot) on the *Sikhar* (peak) marks the top of the temple, on which seven *Dwajas* (flags) are flown along with the *Sudarshan Chakra* (Lord Shri Krishna's disk-like weapon), representing seven different *Sakhis* of Shrinathji. Hence, Shrinathji's *Dwajaji* has all the *gunas* (qualities) of Shrinathji and *darshan* and *seva* of *Dwajaji* is considered to be *darshan* and *seva* of Shrinathji Himself. One can do *seva* of Shrinathji from various parts of the temple like *Paanghar* (Betel leaves house), *Doodhghar* (Milk house), *Phoolghar* (Flowers house), *Shakghar* (Vegetables house), etc. Also, one can do *seva* of *Dwajaji* by offering *Attar* (natural fragrant oils).

When visiting Nathdwara, one can also visit 2nd *Nidhi Swaroop* at *Vitthalnathji Haveli*, *Harirayji Bethakji*, *Gaushala*, *Khimnoor*, *Kankroli* (residence of 3rd *Nidhi Dwarkadishji*), *Lalbag* (garden from where flowers come for Shrinathji's *Shringar*), *Ghasiyar*, etc.



## Did you know?

### Q - What is the difference between Dolotsav and Holi?

A - Holi is celebrated on the 15th day of Fagun Sud according to the lunar calendar. *Holi* (sacred fire) is enlightened after *Shayan Bhog* (dinner) is served to Thakorji and then Holi Poojan is performed. Next, *Gulal* (red colour from flowers) is put on the cheeks and the chin of Thakorji. Then the *abil* (white colour from flowers) and gulal is spread all around Thakorji the next day (i.e., Falgun Vad Ekam). Holi is also, hence known as the festival of colours and marks the beginning of spring.

The second day is Uttara Falgun Nakshatra, and on this day is 'Dolotsav' or 'Dhuleti'. The meaning of 'Dola' (swing) in Sanskrit is *Palaki* or *Hindola* or *Jula*. *Vrajvasis* (residents of Vraj) used to tie a Jula on the branches of trees like *Asopalav* (Ashoka tree), *Amba* (Mango tree), *Jambu* (Rose Apple tree), etc. and then decorate them beautifully. On the Jula, Thakorji and Swaminiji (Radhaji) swung and played with colours obtained from nature like *Abil*, *Gulal*, *Chandan* (sandalwood) & *Kesar* (saffron) & delighted each other.

### Q - What is 'Sansar' according to Shri Mahabrabhuji?

A - 'Ahanta - Mumta' (I-ness, My-ness) (Human Ego) is 'Sansar' as per Shri Mahabrabhuji

### Q - Why is it prohibited to apply *mehndi* (henna) when doing Shri Thakorji's seva?

A - Shri Thakorji's seva is done with 'Baal Bhaav' (Infant affinity). *Mehndi* (henna) emits a pungent odour, which is too strong for Shri Thakorji, hence it is avoided.

## Meet the Youth

**Name:** Janaki Mehta

**What I do:** Risk and Compliance Professional

**What I enjoy:** All things Indian Classical Music and Dance

**Something I couldn't live without:** My phone!

**Fav Food, Colour, Person:** Ice Cream, Pink, My mum!

**Fun Fact:** I am addicted to watching Travel Vlogs!

**What I love about**

**Pushtimarg:** Raag, Bhog and Shringar! But if you ask me to choose from these then the favourite is certainly the music and raag seva! The poetry and music transfers me to another realm

**What I'm looking forward to with the Youth Group:** Meeting up with like-minded young Vaishnavs to be inspired in my spiritual journey and to learn from them. I am inspired by so many of the youth group members and their commitment to seva

**What I enjoy about the Youth Group:** I have made so many friends youth group and love doing seva with them. The highlight is most certainly the annual Katha with Je Je where we get to do seva daily for a whole week - my Seva area of interest during the Katha is serving Prashad and Water! I love speaking to the guests who attend the Katha, and they are always happy to see the youth serving!



## Upcoming Events

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