

**The Deities of New Vrindaban**

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## **Deity Worship in the Hare Krishna Faith**

Hare Krishna devotees make the distinction that they perform Deity worship and not idol worship. Madhudvisa dasa, a member of the New Vrindaban community, explains, “It is Krishna on the altar, not a stone statue or an idol. But unless our eyes are purified we can’t see Krishna, we think he is a statue...but he is Krishna. We worship Krishna, not a ‘form of Krishna’ or a ‘statue of Krishna’.” In other words, Krishna is so spiritual that He cannot be seen with the senses. Therefore, Krishna agrees to appear in the form of a Deity so that devotees can worship and make offerings to Him. More specifically, each day, the devotees cook seven meals for Krishna, bathe and dress Him, and chant and sing songs for Him.

### **Deity Construction**

No hard and fast rules exist to govern the type of material from which the Deities must be constructed. A Deity (also known as a “murti”) can be made out of any type of material because devotees believe that Krishna can appear in any form. According to Madhudvisa dasa, “The Deity is made by a devotee, but the devotee doesn’t try to ‘make’ Krishna. He prays for Krishna to appear in the form of the Deity.”

### **Installing Deities**

The question of whether or not to open a Hare Krishna center must be considered carefully before actions are taken. Once a Hare Krishna temple is installed, it is impossible to un-install the Deities within it. Madhudvisa dasa states that “when we open a temple, we are inviting Krishna. So you can’t say to Krishna, go away...you should always consider that we have invited [the Deities] and if we close the temple, it is an insult.”

## Deities of New Vrindaban

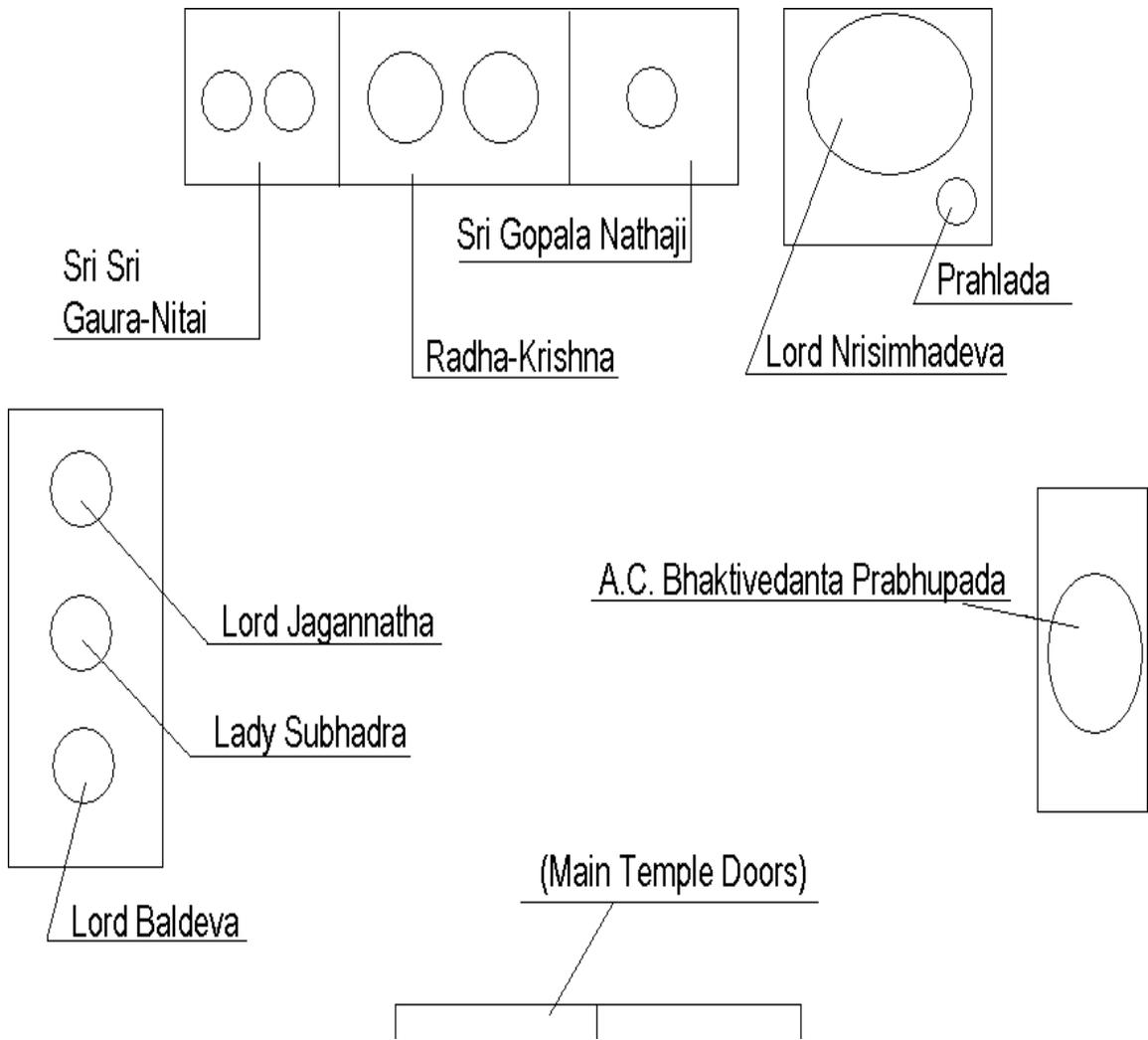
The first Deity worship activity of the day at New Vrindaban is the 'waking of the Deities.' This ritual begins at 4:45 a.m. with the worship of Lord Nrisimhadeva. Here, the devotees sit upon the floor, chanting and playing drums. After approximately 20 to 30 minutes of this, the devotees move to the central altar, which holds from stage right to stage left: Lord Sri Caitanya, Lord Sri Nityananda, Lord Krishna, Sri Sri Radha, and Sri Gopala Nathaji (see the following page for the temple layout). The Deities are enclosed at this time behind large sliding doors. Not until after 15 to 20 minutes of chanting, dancing and drum beating do these doors burst open for the Deities within to be revered. At this time, the instruments come to a hush to make a place for a song on the overhead stereo system; a song by George Harrison (a member of the Beatles and also a Hare Krishna devotee) to name one example. The following page contains a daily schedule followed at New Vrindaban.

Within the temple at New Vrindaban in West Virginia there are many Deities: Radha-Krishna, Srila Prabhupada, Lord Jagannatha, Lord Baladeva, Lady Subhadra, Lord Nrisimhadeva, Lord Caitanya, Lord Nityananda and Sri Gopala Nathaji.

## Radha-Krishna



Sri Sri Radha and Lord Krishna appear together because together they make up the Godhead. The Godhead is the complete conception of God, and they are eternal  
Floor Plan of the Main Temple at New Vrindaban



### Daily Deity Worship Schedule at New Vrindaban

4:45 a.m.-Early Morning Worship  
5:30 a.m. to 7:10 a.m.-CURTAINS CLOSED  
7:10 a.m.-Waking of the Deities  
7:45 a.m.-Lecture from the Srimad Bhagavatan  
8:30 a.m.-Breakfast  
12:30 p.m.-Noon Service  
1:00 p.m.-Lunch  
4:30 p.m.-Afternoon Service  
5:30 p.m.-Bhagavad-Gita Class  
7:00 p.m.-Evening Service  
8:30 p.m.-Last Worship of the Deities

### Supplies used for Worship of the Deities at New Vrindaban

1. Large conch-shell (to blow)
2. A cup of fresh water and a spoon (*acamana* — for purification)
3. Incense sticks (at least three)
4. Ghee lamp (usually five wicks)
5. Small conch-shell (for offering water) with a stand
6. Container of water to be offered
7. Cloth or handkerchief
8. Small plate of flowers
9. Lighter or matches

10. Whisk (*camara*)

11. Bell

Each of these items is offered to the Deities starting from the top down (Krishna first) and then to the devotees.

**Companions.** Lord Krishna is the sun, or source of energy, and Sri Sri Radha is the sunlight, or energy. Radha is always on Krishna's left.

**Sri Sri Radha.** Radha, whose proper name is Sri Sri Radha, appears to the left of Krishna on the altar at New Vrindaban. Radha most often has a white complexion; however, at New Vrindaban She has a golden complexion. Radha's very being is pure, and is defined by selfless love. She loves Krishna wholly. Because Radha loves Krishna entirely, devotees believe that Her desire is to help them on their journeys back to Krishna. She helps the devotees by demonstrating to them the simplicity of loving Krishna.

**Lord Krishna.** Krishna, whose proper name at New Vrindaban is Vrindaban Chandra, is said to have come to Earth 5000 years ago. The name Krishna means "the person who is attractive to everyone," and Krishna is considered all-attractive. He always plays the flute, and is often depicted in artwork doing so. In addition, Krishna is always represented with a crown of peacock feathers on His head. Krishna is usually made of dark-bluish marble; but at New Vrindaban, because He is Vrindaban Chandra (moon), His complexion is white marble. Krishna loves yogurt, cream, and butter; so the devotees offer these things to Him daily.

**Srila Prabhupada**



A.C. Bhaktivedanta Prabhupada was born in 1896 in Calcutta with the birth name Abhay Charan. While Abhay was attending university, he gained a large amount of respect for Gandhi's independence movement in India, and rejected his chemistry degree from his British-run university. In 1922, after he married, Abhay met his spiritual master, Srila Bhaktisiddhanta Saraswati Goswami. Upon his initiation, Abhay was given the Hindu name A.C. Bhaktivedanta Prabhupada. After 14 years of dedication to his spiritual master, Prabhupada wrote to him and asked where his services could be best used. This is when his spiritual master told him to "preach Krishna consciousness to the English speaking world" (A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami).

**Prabhupada's Travels.** Through his studies, Prabhupada traveled to Vrindavana, Krishna's birthplace, where he spent several years studying and writing. After translating a few Hindu works into English, he felt that he was ready to make the journey to America to begin his preaching of Hare Krishna. He endured a difficult trip to New York, but after six months in New York City, a few of his new followers were able to help him rent a storefront and apartment in Manhattan. He taught Krishna consciousness in New York, and his teachings quickly began to spread throughout the United States, and eventually the world.

**Founding of New Vrindaban.** Prabhupada was looking for a cheaper place to begin a community; so he ventured to West Virginia and fell in love with the state's beauty. He chose a site to build his community upon, and quickly realized that the devotees of this community reminded him a great deal of those devotees he was surrounded by during his

stay at Vrindavana. Because of the similarities, Prabhupada named the community New Vrindaban (the English translation of Vrindavana), after the Holy City where Krishna was born.

Until his death in 1977, Prabhupada traveled all over the world, staying at Hare Krishna temples that had been started because of his teachings. He slept very little and spent most of his time translating Vedic texts into English. The devotees at New Vrindaban eventually built a golden palace in his honor, where he stayed when he visited the community (Palace of Gold History).

**Worship of Prabhupada.** Since Prabhupada is represented at New Vrindaban in the form of a “murti,” he is worshiped each day just as the Deities are worshipped. There is a composite figure of him in which he is sitting cross-legged in an extraordinarily lavish, throne-like chair. The figure of Prabhupada is wrapped in salmon colored cloth, and is offered a garland of flowers that the devotees drape around his neck. He is treated with great respect and dignity because of the teachings he has spread around the world.

To show their extreme respect for Prabhupada, devotees at New Vrindaban worship his feet with great care. In Hinduism, feet are considered to be extremely dirty and unworthy. By worshipping Prabhupada’s feet, devotees are humbling themselves in front of a figure that is so much closer to Krishna than they. According to Gauranga Kishore, a devotee at New Vrindaban, this principle is practiced because “...it is by humble submission to God and his devotees that spiritual knowledge is revealed.” In order for devotees to effectively worship his feet, before his death, Prabhupada made a bronze imprint of his feet that has been positioned in front of his figure in the temple. Devotees at New Vrindaban place flowers and other offerings in this imprint to show their humbling respect for the spiritual master.

**“Murti” of Prabhupada.** In addition to the many Deities that appear in Hare Krishna temples, each temple has a “murti,” or form of Srila Prabhupada. The “murti” of Prabhupada is non-different from the Deities of Krishna in that the devotees believe that Prabhupada is present in his “murti,” and can be worshipped as such. Since Prabhupada is the spiritual master, he is on the same level of respect as Krishna, and the devotees worship him accordingly.

**Lord Jagannatha, Lord Baladeva, Lady Subhadra**



The story of Lord Jagannatha, Lord Baladeva, and Lady Subhadra is a unique story of love and devotion of Vrindavana, the Holy City where Krishna was born. Lord Jagannatha is non-different from Lord Krishna; they are the same person, i.e., Jagannatha is an avatar (incarnation) of Krishna. Lord Baladeva is non-different from Lord Balarama; he is an avatar of Lord Balarama, Krishna's brother. Lady Subhadra is the sister of Krishna and Balarama. In this altar, each Deity has its own role. Lord Jagannatha is worshipped as the Lord of the universe. Lord Baladeva's role is to help the devotees gain spiritual strength to overcome the allurements of the material world (Deities). Subhadra means auspicious, and by the grace of Lady Subhadra, a devotee's life can be transformed from being unpromising to being favorable (Deities).

According to Gauranga Kishore, a devotee of New Vrindaban, Jagannatha was born and raised in Vrindavana, which is now a Holy City and a place of pilgrimage for many Hare Krishna devotees. Jagannatha later moved to the city of Dwaraka. However, Jagannatha loved Vrindavana so much, that whenever He heard anyone talk about it, He would be put in an extreme state of love and devotion. One day, while in Dwaraka, a princess wanted to hear about Vrindavana. Uddhava, a friend of Jagannatha, explained Vrindavana to the princess. Uddhava and the princess went into a room where Jagannatha would not be able to hear them, because they knew if Jagannatha heard them He would become very depressed and want to return to Vrindavana immediately (which demonstrates his intense love for Vrindavana).

Baladeva and Subhadra guarded the door so Jagannatha could not hear the story. Jagannatha eventually heard the story, and all three siblings experienced extremely high ecstasy from the description of Vrindavana. Their pupils were dilated, and their arms and legs went inside their bodies (Jagannatha's and Baladeva's almost went completely inside their bodies). All three of them went back to Vrindavana because of their love for their Holy City and the love of their devotees, which spiritually pulled them back to Vrindavana.

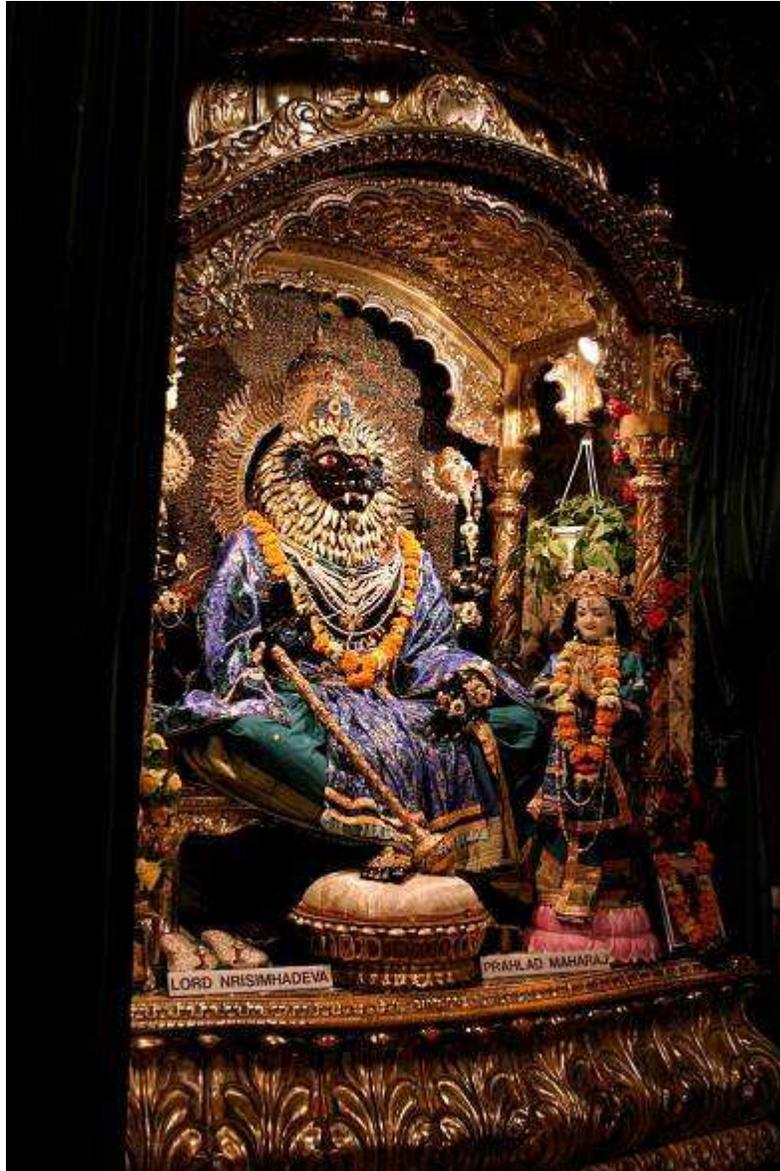
**Ratha-Yatra Festival.** There is a festival dedicated to Lord Jagannatha, Lord Baladeva, and Lady Subhadra called Ratha-yatra. The joyous pilgrims of Hare Krishna pull the chariots of Lord Jagannatha each summer in the town of Puri on the Bay of Bengal (Mares). According to Jan Mares,

“Throughout the year, the Deity of Jagannatha is worshiped in a great temple, the massive stone tower of which dominates the city of Puri. The Deity is not a mere statue. By His supreme potency, the Supreme Lord agrees to personally enter the form of Deity, just to accept the loving service of His devotees. In this sense the Deity is non-different from the Lord Himself. And once a year, Lord Jagannatha comes forth in His entire magnificent splendor to enjoy the Ratha-yatra parade and show Himself to all”.

Each year a grand procession is arranged, during which each of the three Deities rides on a large beautifully decorated cart. The Vedic scriptures state that anyone who sees Lord Jagannatha or pulls His chariots achieves immense spiritual benefit. Lord Jagannatha is famous for being most merciful and affectionate to all His devotees.

**Deities' Appearance.** At New Vrindaban, Lord Jagannatha, Lord Baladeva, and Lady Subhadra are made from local wood from the surrounding area in West Virginia. Inside the temple, the altar is located to the left of the central altar of Radha and Krishna. Lord Jagannatha is painted red and black, and is located stage left on the altar. Lord Baladeva is painted red and white, and is located stage right on the altar. Lady Subhadra is in the middle and is painted golden. They are decorated with robes, jewelry, and there are smaller images of themselves at the bottom of the altar.

### **Lord Nrisimhadeva**



Lord Nrisimhadeva is yet another incarnation of Krishna. In this instance, Krishna took the form of a half man, half lion creature to fight Hiranyakaipu, King of the demons. In a previous agreement that Hiranyakaipu had made with Lord Brahma, the creator God, Hiranyakaipu was granted numerous wishes about his death. Brahma agreed that Hiranyakaipu would never die "...by any living entity created by Lord Brahma; within any residence or outside any residence; during the daytime or at night; on the ground or in the sky; by any weapon, human being, or any animal; by anything living or nonliving..." (New Zealand). At this point, Hiranyakaipu was under the assumption that he would be an immortal.

**Hiranyakaipu's Son.** Hiranyakaipu also had a son, but his son was much different from him. Instead of being a demon, his son Prahlada was a devotee of Krishna from birth. At a very young age Prahlada preached of Krishna to everyone he came in contact with,

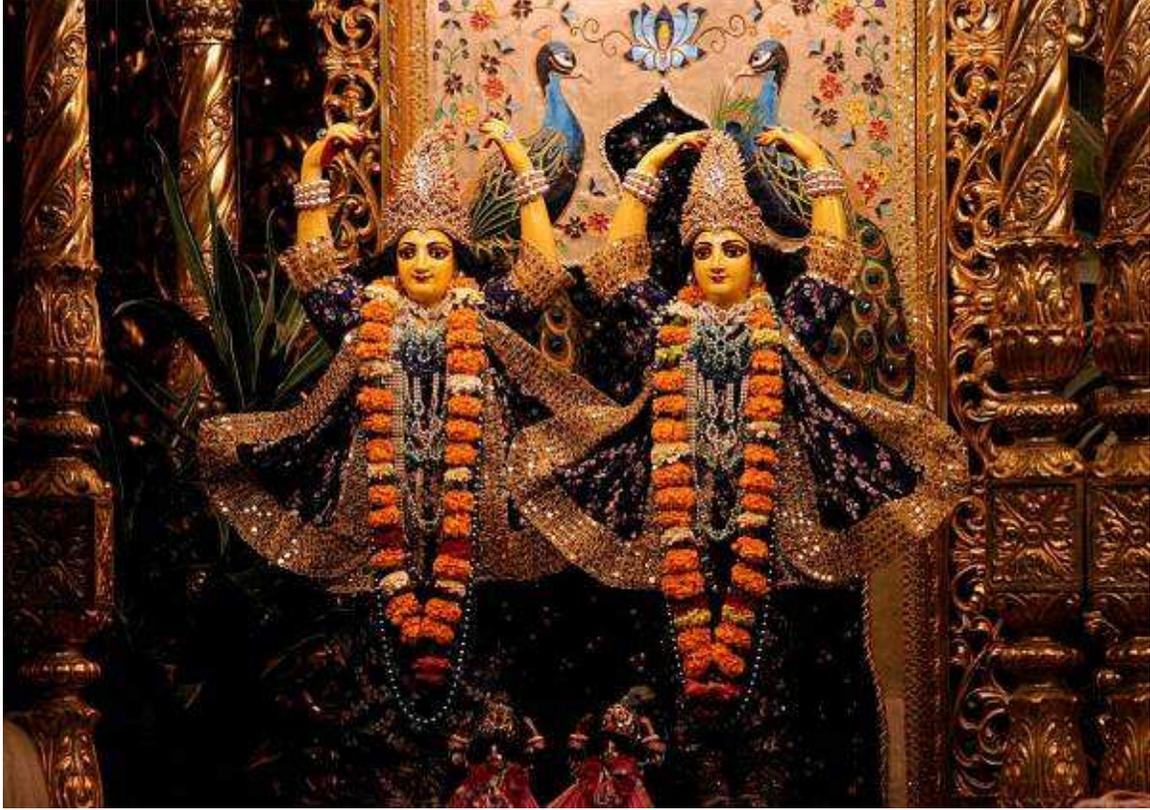
especially to his peers at his elementary school. When Hiranyakaipu found this out, he was furious and ordered his guards to kill his son. To accomplish this, the guards first threw Prahlada into a circle of cannibals. When this occurred, Prahlada began to chant Hare Krishna and was protected from the cannibals. After surviving this ordeal, the guards proceeded to throw Prahlada into a vat of boiling hot oil, take him to an island where he endured a hurricane, throw him off a cliff, pitch him under the trampling feet of an elephant, and then into a pit filled with venomous snakes. In each of these instances, Prahlada was kept safe because of his constant chanting of the Hare Krishna Mantra. Finally, Prahlada's food was poisoned. However, before eating his food, Prahlada was kept safe because he offered it to Krishna, at which time his food became prasadam, free of poison, and safe for him to eat (The Appearance).

After his son endured and survived all of this punishment, Hiranyakaipu began to wonder why his son was so protected, and confronted him about Krishna. After arguing for a while, Hiranyakaipu pointed to a pillar and asked his son if Krishna was in it. Prahlada replied "Yes, my Lord is in that pillar," (The Appearance). Hiranyakaipu proceeded to smash the pillar, at which time Lord Nrisimhadeva spilled out in His half man, half lion form. He was equipped with four weapons (a club, a disk, a conch shell, and a lotus flower) that He held in each of His four hands (The Appearance).

**Hiranyakaipu's Death.** Lord Nrisimhadeva was so furious with Hiranyakaipu for trying to kill a dear devotee of His that He vowed to kill the demon. At twilight, in a doorway, Nrisimhadeva threw the demon onto His lap and began to rip apart the demon's body with His razor sharp nails (The Appearance). By killing Hiranyakaipu in this manner, He kept true to every stipulation of the promise that Lord Brahma had made. Once the demon was dead, Lord Nrisimhadeva was drenched in blood and His eyes were full of fury. To celebrate His victory, He placed a garland of Hiranyakaipu's intestines around His neck before throwing the demon's body away and killing his followers (Lord Nrisimha's Pastime).

**At New Vrindaban.** Due to Lord Nrisimhadeva's willingness to protect His devotees, New Vrindaban devotees spend a portion of each day chanting and praying to Him for spiritual protection. At New Vrindaban, Lord Nrisimhadeva is made of black marble and is always decorated with an abundance of fresh, colorful flowers. The Deity is represented with four arms, four weapons, and Prahlada standing beside the Lord, praising Him.

**Sri Sri Gaura-Nitai**



Situated at the head of the temple, and to the right of where Lord Krishna and his consort Sri Radha rest (Radha-Krishna) is Lord Sri Caitanya (incarnation of Lord Krishna), and to His left stands Lord Sri Nityananda (Lord Caitanya's brother). Collectively, the two are known as Sri Sri Gaura-Nitai.

**Lord Caitanya.** According to Hindu legend, Lord Krishna appeared in 1486 in Mayapur, India manifesting Himself as Lord Caitanya. This was the age of Kali Yuga, a time of decline in universal religious practice. Caitanya appeared in order to deliver all souls from the clutches of illusion and irreligion, and to show the perfect example of how devotional service should be performed during this time. He executed this task by spreading the glory of the names of Krishna and His consort Radha, thereby spiritualizing mankind with the chanting of these holy names (Sri Caitanya).

**Nityananda.** Caitanya and His associates, including His brother Nityananda, asked others to chant the holy names with them in the hope of purifying humanity. They introduced a method that was simple and joyful, which was to chant and dance. Caitanya preached Bhakti, which is a religious path that emphasizes love and devotion to God. Bhakti is a path defined by three interrelated premises: that humankind shares in the nature of divinity; that humankind must participate in the worship of divinity through action (especially by chanting God's name), and that humankind must be guided by devotion to God and by a spiritual guru. (Sri Caitanya)

**At New Vrindaban.** Overall, Nityananda and Caitanya brought God to the masses with a supremely joyful and heartfelt approach for the benefit and healing of mankind. This

fact is evident in the physical characteristics of Caitanya and Nityananda's representations in the New Vrindaban temple room. Their arms are raised, and they appear to be in motion. They are dancing in joyful worship and celebration of God. The Hare Krishna devotees of New Vrindaban embrace this form of worship as they often dance and chant before these Deities. The devotees are perhaps most active in this fashion in the early morning during a ceremony known as the 'waking of the Deities.'

### **Sri Gopala Nathaji**



Just to the left of Krishna and Radha stands the Deity Sri Gopala Nathaji. This Deity is the representation of Krishna as a child, given another name. Sri Gopala Nathaji was a cow herder and a flute player. Two flutes can be seen in the right hand of the Deity in the temple room. His facial complexion is blackish, and He holds lotus flowers. His downward gaze is a merciful glance looking upon us all (Sri Nathaji). This Deity is also depicting a scenario in which the young child Krishna gave shelter to His devotees. He descended to our world to dissuade the worship of demigods for material gains, and to establish the true position of the personality of Godhead. He therefore took it upon Himself to save His village according to that purpose.

According to legend, Lord Indra was king of the demigods, and full of false pride. A large yajna (sacrifice) was being planned for him in Krishna's village since he was the controlling Deity of rainfall and Vrindavana, a farming community. Krishna contested, and He insisted rather that the people worship the spiritual Brahmans of the community and the Govardhana hill, which provided the farmers with sacred amenities such as grass, water, and shelter for the cows. They did as He requested, angering Lord Indra who, in turn, brought about a great rainstorm. It was then that Krishna lifted the Govardhana hill with a single finger on His left hand to allow the families and the animals to take shelter underneath it for seven days. They did not feel the effects of discomfort, hunger, or thirst due to Krishna's mystic potency. After these seven days, Lord Indra gave in, realizing that he was actually up against the Supreme Personality of the Godhead. Lord Indra was eventually forgiven, as Krishna saw that he was, within himself, a sincere devotee (The Glories).

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#### **Conclusion**

All the Deities that are installed in New Vrindaban are important in their own ways. The followers of Hare Krishna devote their entirety to worshipping and praising the many Deities. Devotees believe that we are each moved and guided by certain emotional characteristics, and that these emotions connect us with God. Some people, according to their personal emotional characteristics, may see God as their son, friend, or guide. Therefore, some choose to give certain Deities in the temple more attention and personal affection than others. This occurs according to the emotional understanding or connection that they have with a certain Deity's personality or traits.