

THE SPIRITUAL SCIENTIST

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The Significance of Janmashtami

Festivals are an integral part of every culture. They provide a welcome break from the humdrum routine of daily life. The Vedic culture is special in that every aspect of it is oriented to bring its followers close to God. Every festival celebrated in Vedic culture is deeply related to God and is meant to be celebrated in such a way as to help everyone come joyfully closer to God. Recently worldwide Janmashtami was celebrated fervently. Let us try to understand the inner significance of this historic festival.

A MYTH?

Is Janmashtami not just a traditional Hindu festival? Is Krishna not a mythological figure?

The 5000 temples of Lord Krishna in the tiny 88 square miles of Vrindavana, the birth-place of Krishna, bear eloquent testimony to the fact that devotion to Krishna is no imaginary sentiment. The remains of Dwarka, gradually being found in the Arabian Sea, reveal the majesty of that erstwhile city built by Lord Krishna. Kurukshetra, the site of the massive fratricidal Mahabharata war, continues to exist even today. So Krishna is indeed a historical personality and Janmashtami a factual historical event.

WHO IS KRISHNA ?

The design, order and structured organization evident throughout the creation insist that there is a Super-intelligent Creator. The Vedic scriptures and, indeed all scriptures throughout the world, give us further information about this Supreme Being, who is known variously as Jehovah, Yahweh, Allah, Rama and so on. The Supreme Person is full of extraordinary attributes, which make Him universally attractive. The name which describes this all-attractiveness of the Lord is His most complete name. Hence the name Krishna, meaning 'the all-attractive one', describes the Absolute Truth, the Supreme Personality of Godhead, in full.

THE AVATAR

The Lord administers the world through the laws of material nature - gross such as the law of gravitation and subtle such as the law of karma. But when there is too much of a disturbance in the universal order, the Lord descends Himself "to deliver the pious, annihilate the miscreants and reestablish the principles of religion" *paritranaya sadhunam vinashaya cha dushkritam dharma samsthapanarthaya sambhavami yuge yuge* (Bhagavad-gita 4.8)

Such an incarnation is called an avatar, 'one who descends'

THE LORD OF THE HEART

The Supreme Lord is not just a neutral administrator, but the best friend of all living beings *suhridam sarva bhutanam* (Bhagavad-gita 5.29) The love that the heart longs for through relationships with various persons finds fulfillment only when it is reposed in the Supreme Person God. Because it is only then that the love is never interrupted, never

betrayed, never let down, never disappointed. That is why saints and devotees across the religious spectrum throughout history have been the happiest persons, radiating love towards one and all.

But unfortunately in this world of matter, all living beings are attracted not to the Lord of their heart but to matter and material enjoyment. However matter being limited and finite can never fulfil the unlimited desires of our spirits; material enjoyment satiates but never satisfies.

So the Lord comes into this material world and performs superhuman activities which reveal His supreme position and His unparalleled love for His devotees. For example, the Lord lifted a massive mountain Govardhan in order to protect His devotees from oppressive rains. Such acts appear impossible to the logical mind, but an ant would similarly consider the lifting of a book by a human being as 'impossible'. For the Lord possessing unlimited power, such an act is not at all difficult.

Through such incredible acts, the Lord shows all of us how much He loves us, His children. By attracting our hearts back to him, He desires to take us to the realm of eternal happiness away from this realm of fleeting enjoyment.

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF JANMASHTAMI

5000 years ago on Janamashtmi, The Lord appeared at midnight. This is indeed a historical fact, but it also has a deeper significance. Midnight is the time of maximum darkness and from the moment the Lord appeared the darkness started diminishing. Similarly our heart is dark being afflicted by multiple anxieties and miseries. But in the darkest hour of our life, when we turn to the Lord and He appears in our heart, all the darkness recedes and the light of eternal hope starts streaming in.

The Lord appeared in a prison cell amidst shackles and then freed His parents . This indicates that all of us who are shackled by our own material desires can be freed by the Lord who appears in our heart which is like a prison house.

So the real Janmashtami will take place when the Lord appears in our hearts. Though we do not know it, all of us are actually pining for this Janmashtami to occur. All of us want love, care, protection and happiness and this is what the actual Janmashtami - the appearance of the Lord in our heart - brings.

THE KALI YUGA INCARNATION

How then can we make the Lord appear in our hearts? Indeed amidst all the chaos and disorder prevalent in the present Age of Kali, why has the Lord not appeared as per His eternal promise in Bhagavad-gita?

It is said in the Vedic scriptures *kali kale nama rupe krishna avatar* "In Kali Yuga the Lord incarnates in the form of His Holy Name" That is why all bona fide religions teach their followers to chant the names of God. For example, the Bible says 'Let the Lord always be on your lips', the Islamic religion mentions the 99 names of Allah to be regularly chanted and the Vedic scriptures abound with instructions regarding the chanting of the Holy Names. And among all the mantras (empowered sound vibrations) mentioned in the Vedic scriptures, the Hare Krishna maha-mantra "Hare Krishna Hare Krishna Krishna Krishna Hare Hare, Hare Ram Hare Ram Ram Ram Hare Hare" is said to be the most potent. Sincere spiritual practitioners from all religions testify to the purifying potency of the Holy Name. It helps them to become free from all carnal desires and awakens within them love of God.

Thus for all of us living in Kali Yuga, the real Janmashtami will occur when by regular mantra meditation our heart becomes cleansed and the Lord appears in our heart, thus freeing us forever from the clutches of misery and transporting us to the realm of eternal enjoyment.

Join us next month for another session of thought-provoking discussion.

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Dedicated to

**His Divine Grace A C Bhaktivedanta Swami Srila Prabhupada,
The Greatest Spiritual Scientist of the Modern Times**

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