

VNN NEWS from Birmingham: High commissioner chants Hare Krsna in Victoria Square

Submitted by Vrndavana dasa [of Govinda's Juices in Honolulu, Hawaii]

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Like the rising sun from the east, Lord Jagannatha and His representative, Srila Bhaktivedanta Narayana Gosvami Maharaja, graced the streets of downtown Birmingham city today with an ecstatic procession down the Street (the main thoroughfare of the city). The devotees danced and chanted with great jubilation as the smiling face of the Lord enchanted more than ten thousand onlookers, and the busy shopkeepers came out onto the street to witness this historical event. Downtown Birmingham was transformed into a city of happy, loving souls as the Lord blessed all who viewed His transcendental form. The cart procession proceeded to the town square, known as Victoria Square, where a large pandal was set up for Srila Narayana Maharaja to speak. A mini fair with stalls was organized by the local devotees and their friends from many diverse groups and billed as, 'A Universal Interfaith Gathering' in honor of the Lord of the Universe, Lord Jagannatha.

Sripad Ashram Maharaja, an inspired preacher and sannyasa-disciple of Srila Narayana Maharaja, along with Pradyumna Misra dasa brahmacari, the president of the Birmingham Gour Govinda Gaudiya Matha, and other local English devotees, organized the Lord's Ratha-yatra festival. Sripad Ashram Maharaja had been cultivating a friendship with the dignitaries in Birmingham, and invited them to attend the festival. Mr. Sapra, the Council General of the Indian Consulate spoke first. He conveyed the importance of the tradition of the Ratha-yatra festival, and he then chanted Hare Krsna and thanked the devotees and Srila Narayana Maharaja for continuing this vital religious festival. Then the Deputy Mayor of Birmingham, Mrs. Teresa Stewart, thanked the devotees and Srila Maharaja, and she expressed great appreciation for his message. Also present was Mr. Sharma, the president of the National Council of Hindu Temples and Vice Co. Chairman of Interfaith Network U.K. He was extremely pleased to be present, and he glorified the devotees and Srila Maharaja for their efforts to bring Lord Jagannatha to the people of Birmingham. Next was Ms. Kamala Wood, of Life Foundation Worldwide. She brought the world peace flame, which had traveled around the world from five continents, and has been presented to the Pope, Nelson Mandella, and others who were known to have been instrumental in bring about world peace. With great honor she presented it to Srila Maharaja.

Srila Maharaja gracefully received the torch and pointed out that this idea of the torch originated from Vedic times and represented the idea of the living entity coming out of darkness into light. Ms. Wood then presented him with a plaque, thanking him for his contribution to world peace. With great humility he thanked the dignitaries for coming and being part of the festival. He then spoke of the pastimes of Lord Jagannatha and their deep philosophical meaning. Such a great success and wonderful transcendental time for all that were fortunate enough to be present there!

Among those disciples and followers of Srila Narayana Maharaja who were accompanying and assisting him were international preachers of the Gaudiya Vedanta

Samhiti. Such preachers included Sripad Bhaktivedanta Madhava Maharaja, Sripad Bhaktivedanta Tirtha Maharaja, Sripad Van Maharaja, Sripad Aranya Maharaja, and Srimati Jadurani devi dasi and Srimati Visakha devi dasi.

Sripad Ashram Maharaja, along with devotees from the Birmingham temple, have also been cultivating a friendship with the leaders of a local Sikh community. The Sikhs happily offered their facility, the Nam Dhari Sikh Gurudwara, situated on Coventry Road, free of charge, from June 22nd to the 29th, to host Srila Narayana Maharaja. There, over five hundred gathered every evening to hear from him about the deep internal meaning of the festival of Lord Jagannatha, as well as the deep moods of the parikaras, the eternal Vrndavana associates, in relation to Lord Jagannatha's Ratha mohatsava. So inspiring were Srila Maharaji's classes that fifty or so fortunate souls took the opportunity to formally become his disciples.