

Dear Maharajas, Prabhus and Didis,

Dandavat pranamas. Jaya Sri Sri Guru and Gauranga.

Special thanks are due to Sripada Bhaktivedanta Aranya Maharaja, who has kindly written the reports about Janmastami Eve, Janmastami Day, and Nandotsava. Thanks also to Srimati Surati devi dasi and Srimati Savitri devi dasi for assisting with the typing.

Your aspiring servant, Syamarani dasi

THREE AMAZING FESTIVALS: JANMASTAMI, PRABHUPADA'S APPEARANCE DAY, AND NANDOTSAVA

Janmastami Eve Procession

For several days leading up to the Appearance Day of Bhagavan Sri Krsna, thousands of sadhus and pilgrims were finding their way to Mathura Dhama to observe the Janmastami-vrata (vow), to have darsan of Kamsa's Dungeon where Vasudeva Krsna appeared 5000 years ago, to bathe in the sacred Yamuna, and to perform parikrama of the many significant tirthas in and around Mathura. By the causeless mercy of Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu, all such pilgrims, along with the local residents of Mathura Dhama, had the immensely good fortune to take part in a unique maha nagara-sankirtan festival organised by Sri Kesavaji Gaudiya Matha, under the affectionate guidance of Sri Srimad Tridandisvami Bhaktivedanta Narayana Gosvami Maharaja.

On adivasa, the day prior to Sri Krsna Janmastami, hundreds of faithful Vaisnavas assembled at 5.00p.m on the main street in front of Sri Kesavaji Gaudiya Matha. This extraordinary parade immediately began to attract thousands of joyful onlookers, curious to observeii such a formidable sankirtan party. Spearheading the procession was a huge elephant, brightly painted with the holy names and driven by Sripad Bhaktivedanta Mangal Maharaja. The elephant was closely followed by so many standard bearers and a camel, and equipped on either side of his humps with thundering kettledrums. Then came a traditional marching brass band, playing Vraja songs in glorification of the Divine Couple. Behind the band, two young boys, exquisitely dressed as Sri Krsna and Balarama, were gracefully parading on two splendid horses and casting their merciful sidelong glances upon the delighted crowds. Then came the first kirtan party comprising the international wing of Sri Gaudiya Vedanta Samiti, with devotees from England, U.S.A., South America, Australia, France, Holland, Philippines, Fiji, New Zealand, and other countries. Behind the foreign affairs department came a float that was elaborately decorated to resemble a beautiful Vrndavana Kunja. Within that kunja some local children, who looked a lot like Sri Sri Radha-Krsna, were seated upon a jewelled throne in the midst of their beloved sakhis.

As if this were not enough, a team of local Vrajavasi young men, and further down the line a group of local Vrajavasi ladies, were singing songs about Vrajendranandana and dancing with the rhythmic striking of batons as per the traditional customs. Then came a float upon which Sri Srimad Bhaktivedanta Narayana Maharaja was regally ensconced among some of the prominent sannyanis of Sri

Gaudiya Vedanta Samiti such as Pujoyapada Bhaktivedanta Madhusudana Maharaja and Pujoyapada Bhaktivedanta Madhava Maharaja. This float was closely followed by a kirtan party comprising sannyasis and brahmacaris from Mathura, Vrndavana and Navadvipa Dhama. This, the third kirtan party, sang melodious and love-laden kirtan for the pleasure of Sri Gaurasundara and Sri Sri Radha-Vinodabihari, who were accepting the service of the devotees from their simhasana on the next float. Furthermore, there were many other attractive floats in honour of Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu, Sri Sri Jagannatha, Baladeva and Subhadra, and other worshipful manifestations of Sri Krsnacandra.

Flanked on both sides by volunteers carrying lights and a large military escort, the entire pageant set off with a flourish of trumpets and began to wind its way around downtown Mathura. Thus, for the next four and a half hours the streets were filled with the auspicious uproar of harinama sankirtan, as practiced and preached by the Great Master Himself, Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu. Such a kaleidoscopic furore amidst such a plethora of musical accompaniments is rarely seen on this side of the Viraja River.

At approximately 9.30p.m. the various kirtan parties reached a crescendo as they arrived once again outside the gate of Sri Kesavaji Gaudiya Matha. After giving Jaya Dhvani to our Sri Guru Parampara, apart from being both exhausted and happy, all the Vaisnavas were left with a very distinct and magical impression that... "Tomorrow must be the birthday of the all-merciful ocean of rasa, Syamasundara Sri Krsna!"

We pray that the Supreme Personality of Godhead may be satisfied by our insignificant endeavors to please Him.

Janmastami Day

At 6.30 a.m. on the auspicious morning of Janmastami day, Srila Bhaktivedanta Narayana Maharaja went to have darsana of the sacred appearance place of Bhagavan Sri Krsna, and then promptly returned to Sri Kesavaji Gaudiya Matha to give a pravacan. First of all, Srila Maharaja requested the devotees to sing Sri Mangal Gitam, and then he commented as follows:

"Once a devi-dasi was singing this song nearby the Sri Mandir in Puri. Upon hearing it Sri Jagannatha became so overwhelmed with bhava that He immediately ran out of the temple. His ornaments were scattered here and there and His cloth was torn as He rushed through thorny undergrowth. Similarly, when Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu heard this song He became mad and ran to embrace the songstress. Why? What is in this kirtan that excites such intense emotion?"

Srita kamala kuca mandala dhrta kundala! e

Kalita lalita vana mala! Jaya jaya deva hare

"Jayadeva Gosvami is the author of this song and he is glorifying his istadeva Sri Sri Radha-Madhava. Here Kamala refers to Srimati Radhika. Vana mala means 'a garland of forest flowers.' Who will wear simple forest flowers? Ramacandra? No. Vana mala is worn only by vana cari, Krsna. Kalita lalita means that Krsna's garland reaches from his neck to his knees or feet. It is made of flowers of five or seven colours and many pendants of fragrant tulsi manjaris. Bees are hovering around it, attracted by the makaranda oozing from the flowers. His kundala, earrings, are his acute curiosity to hear about the qualities of Srimatiji. May that Gopinath be victorious!

Dina mani mandala mandana! Bhava khandana e

Muni jana manasa hamsa jaya jaya deva hare

"Dina mani is the sun, Krsna. Srimati Radhika is the mandana, ornament, of His rasa-mandala. Krsna is the swan who sports in the lake of the pure hearts of the munis. Here munis refers to the four Kumaras, Srila Vyasadeva and Sukadeva Gosvami; moreover it refers to Sri Rupa and Sri Sanatana Gosvami etc.

Kaliya visadhara ganjana! Jana ranjana! e

Yadukula nalina dinesa! Jaya jaya deva hare

"Jana ranjana means He is trying to please the Vrajavasis. When Kaliya encircled Krsna in his coils, how the Vrajavasis became immersed in thoughts of Krsna. They wanted to enter the poisonous lake, but Baladeva checked them. Thus their meditation deepened even more. Then Krsna broke free and began to dance on the hoods of Kaliya. All the Vrajavasis became so pleased. But what was Krsna's inner intention? He wanted to show His heroism to please the gopis. Here the Krsna of the Yadu dynasty is not Dvarakadhisa Krsna, but Krsna of Vrndavan. How? Devamidha Maharaja was a king in the dynasty of Yadu. From the womb of one wife, who was from a ksatriya dynasty, he begot a son named Surasena. From the womb of another wife, who was from a vaisya family, he begot a son named Parjanya. Vasudeva, the father of Dvarakadhisa Krsna is the son of Surasena and Nanda Maharaja, the father of Vraja Krsna, is the son of Parjanya Maharaja. Thus Krsna in Vraja is also in the Yadu vamsa.

Janaka-suta-krta bhusana! Jita dusana! e

Samara samita dasakantha! Jaya jaya deva hare

"Rama-lila is one of Krsna's lilas. In the form of Rama, Krsna has established maryada, the codes of righteous conduct, and by doing so He has made a platform from which one can practice bhakti to Sri Sri Radha-Krsna. Here Jayadeva Gosvami remembers how Sitaji is doing srngara of Ramacandra. But how? Only on two occasions: Sita gave a garland to Rama at Her svayamvara and also on their return to Ayodhya.

Abhinava-jaladhara sundara! Dhrta mandara! e

Sri mukha candra cakora! Jaya jaya deva hare

"Here dhrta mandara refers to Krsna lifting Govardhana. Why did He lift Giriraja? To cut the pride of Indra? To protect the Vrajavasis? All these reasons are secondary. Jayadeva Gosvami gives the answer: Sri mukha candra cakora. Krsna and the gopis were always surrounded by their elders. There was very little chance to meet or even see each other. Therefore, because Krsna is like a thirsty cakora bird, eager to relish the nectar of the moonlike face of Srimati Radharani, He lifted Govardhana to create the first opportunity to meet closely and see Her beauty without any break of disruption.

Sri jayadeva kaver idam kurute mudam

Mangalam-ujjala gitam jaya jaya deva hare

"This gita is mangala because Sri Radha has been glorified. If anyone wants to enter bhajana-rajya, the realm of loving service, he should have very strong mamata (possessiveness) for Sri Sri Radha-Krsna. How will this mamata come? First visrambhena guru seva, one should serve Sri Gurudeva with intimacy and affection. Gurudeva gives us so much, so why not feel indebted and serve him with one's life and soul? If we cannot have mamata for the one who gives us krsna seva vasana and who nourishes our bhakti-lata, then we will have to have mamata for the wealthy, powerful or attractive persons of this world. Thus by asat-sanga we will be ruined.

(On the request of Srila Maharaja the devotees sang Sri Dasavatara Stotram. He then commented as follows:)

"Why is Jayadeva Gosvami, who is so rasika, beginning his Sri Gita-govinda with a description

of the ten prominent avataras? If a person eats only rasamalaya for breakfast, lunch and dinner, he will never appreciate it. If he takes something bitter, savoury, sour, and so many other preparations, then, when he tastes rasamalaya he thinks, "This is the king of all preparations!" Similarly, Jayadeva Gosvami has glorified the astonishing pastimes of all the avataras to enhance our appreciation of Krsna. Kesava dhrtā dasa-vidhā rūpa. Krsna Himself has appeared in these ten forms. If there are twenty mighty wrestlers assembled together in one place and they all fight each other, when all have been defeated and only one is left standing, then we will think that he is so powerful and expert. Otherwise, if we were to meet that same wrestler in a situation where there were no opponents, we would not be able to appreciate his marvelous prowess.

"In this song Jayadeva Gosvami presents the gradual evolution of the theistic conception for the sake of attracting all jivas who are in different stages of their own spiritual evolution. Not everyone will be attracted to rasa-lila, but their first attraction may be to Matsya, Kurma or Nrsimha. Even Sri Caitanya Mahāprabhu performed pastimes in many forms to attract and give mercy to all.

"When Jayadeva Gosvami was writing Sri Gita-govinda, he saw in his trance how Krsna gave His vamsi, mukut, and even His head at the lotus feet of Srimati Radhika in order to break Her mana. His hand began to tremble. His heart was also trembling. He was unable to write about it. Why? Because his mood was not suddha-madhurya. He put down his pen and went to take bath in the river. In the meantime, Krsna had to personally come in the form of Jayadeva Gosvami and write the line, smara garala khandanam mama sirasi mandanam dehi pada-pallavam udaram. "O Radhike! I am feeling the virulent affliction of Cupid. Please be merciful to me by decorating my head with your lotus feet." Jayadeva Gosvami could not write this, but our Gaudiya guru-varg has written such things directly and elaborately because such verses are actually so pleasing to Krsna.

Yat kinkarīsu bahusah khalu kaku-vani
Nityam parasya purusasya sikhanda-mauleh
Tasya kada rasa-nidher vrsabhanujayas
Tat keli kunjā bhavanāngana-marjani syam

"The eternal Supreme Personality of Godhead, who wears a peacock feather in His hair, falls at the feet of Her maidservants and propitiates them with many humble and grief-stricken words to be allowed to enter Her kunjā. Oh, how successful my life would be if I could become even one stick in the broom used by the sakhis to sweep that kunjā where an endless ocean of rasa in the form of the daughter of Vrsabhanu Maharaja engages in delightful amorous play." (Sri Radha-Rasa-Sudha-Nidhi 8)

"Krsna is not fully controlled by the recitation of the writings of Jayadeva Gosvami, but Srila Raghunath Das Gosvami has described how Krsna personally decorates the feet of Kisoriji and writes His name there. Moreover, he has even described how Srimati Radharani makes Her stamp of ownership on the head of Krsna with the alta from her feet. This is the vaisistya (speciality) of our Gosvamis. If Krsna hears such prayers He will feel indebted and think, 'How can I ever repay you?' So we should recite the prayers of our Gosvamis. Jayadeva Gosvami could not write these things because he was not under the guidance of gopis like Sri Rupa Manjari."

After Srila Maharaja's pravacan, Puṅjapada Bhaktivedanta Trtha Maharaja began to recite and comment on Srimad Bhagavatam 10th Canto from the first verse onwards. This Bhagavatam Katha continued for ten hours by the combined efforts of several prominent Vaisnavas. Then, at 7.00 p.m. kirtana began and continued until midnight with a mixture of Gaudiya bhajanas in Bengali and charming traditional bhajanas in Vraj-bhasa. Thus all the members of Sri Kesavaji Gaudiya Matha sat in the holy presence of Srila Bhaktivedanta Narayana Maharaja and relished the mellows of nama-sankirtana for five hours while literally thousands of pilgrims flowed through the temple room eager to have darsana of

Sri Sri Radha-Vinodabihari and partake of the kirtana and swing festival.

At midnight, the auspicious moment of the birth of Sri Krsnacandra, a Maha-abhiseka began. All the devotees looked on in great satisfaction as Sri Sri Radha-Krsna were bathed in milk, yoghurt, honey, rose-water and so on. Although most had fasted completely from food and even from water throughout this exceptionally hot Janmastami day, and many were feeling exhausted, still, upon witnessing the bathing ceremony of their beloved ista-deva and devi, all fatigue, hunger and thirst miraculously disappeared. Thus the statement of Srimad Bhagavatam was subjectively apparent to the faithful participants.

yatha taror mula nisekanena
 trpyanti tat skandha-bhujopasakhah
 pranopaharac ca yathendriyanam
 tathaiva sarvarhanam acyutejya

"By pouring water on the root of a tree, all the leaves and branches are automatically nourished. In the same way, by offering service to the lotus feet of Sri Krsna, all other purposes are satisfied. Just as by offering food to the stomach all the limbs of the body are satisfied, similarly, by offering service to Sri Krsna the entire universe is satisfied."

(Srimad Bhagavatam 4.31.14)

Sri Caranamrta from the abhiseka was distributed among the crowds of pilgrims. Then, with renewed vigor, the resident Vaisnavas and volunteers began to serve out the Janmastami mahamahotsava maha-prasada to all the guests before honouring maha-prasada themselves. The post-prasada clean-up finished just in time for the Sri Mangala-arati which heralded the arrival of...

Sri Nandotsava -- The Grand Festival of Nanda Maharaja and divine Appearance Day of Sri Srimad Bhaktivedanta Swami Maharaja.

Sri Nandotsava, the grand festival of Nanda Baba, is always something of a spectacle at Sri Kesavaji Gaudiya Matha, and this year was no exception. From 6.30 a.m. Srila Bhaktivedanta Narayana Maharaja presided over the assembly in honour of the founder-acarya of Iskcon, Nityalila Pravista Om Visnupada Sri Srimad Bhaktivedanta Swami Maharaja, known affectionately amongst his followers as 'Srila Prabhupada

Prabhupada's Appearance Day

This mahotsava actually began just after mongala arati, and Srila Maharaja arrived at about 6:30am. He first called on some of Prabhupada's senior disciples and followers to offer their heartfelt puspunjali in the form of words of glorification. Srimati Vrindavana Vilasini didi began her beautiful talk by saying that on this day Nanda Baba gave charity. On a person's birthday he gives in charity, and on this day Krsna gave Prabhupada in charity to the world.

Brajanatha prabhu glorified Prabhupada nicely by saying that the western world would not have come to bhakti if it were not for him. He quoted Prabhupada's statement in relation to the Krsna-Balarama mandir, that, "If one of my devotees is attracted to hearing the glories of Krsna, this temple is successful."

After this, Srila Maharaja himself made an offering. He said that if one does not know the heart of Gurudeva he cannot serve. On one hand one must follow the orders of Gurudeva, but sometimes Gurudeva may be like Krsna when He told the gopis to go home, and He really meant the opposite. That is why the gopis were able to defeat Krsna in their discussion with Him, and then they all engaged in rasa-lila. A disciple who knows the heart of Gurudeva is rare in this world, and he himself is qualified to make disciples all over the world.

Srila Maharaja humbly asked his audience, "Do you know who is the most senior disciple? Myself. I became his siksa disciple when there was no Iskcon -- in 1946. Sometimes the siksa-guru is superior and sometimes the diksa-guru is superior, but I saw him just as I saw my diksa-guru. I am his first disciple and I will be there until the end. All others may fall, but I will never fall. That is why I'm preaching everywhere in the world, and that is why so many are coming to me. What is my credit? I'm like a dry straw, but he is inspiring me and therefore I'm doing something. Those who are coming to me, or to anyone, are coming from reading his books and hearing his voice -- his words.

"We can know a person by his company. How great was Srila Swami Maharaja that he came on Nandotsava. He was so powerful. He went to his Srila Prabhupada, who was attracted to him and ordered him to preach in English and write articles. He inspired and initiated him, and he became a bosom friend of our Gurudeva in lokika-sadbandhuvat, just like ordinary, intimate friends. He took sannyasa here at this Kesavaji Gaudiya Matha. Just prior to that he had not a farthing nor a shirt. When he told me his story I told him to at once take sannyasa. Then my guru Maharaja came and told him the same thing -- to take sannyasa just now. He then took sannayasa on the holy day of Visvarupa Mahotsava. I was like the priest. I gave him his dor-kopin and taught him how to wear it, and I performed the sannyasa ceremony.

"Although he was poor, he was very intelligent. He managed to go to the West by Scindia Navigation, and in a couple of years he preached the message of Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu and Srila Rupa Gosvami. He made lakhs of disciples and followers. When I went to the West I saw that in the mountains, in the forests, on the sea, in the cities, on farms --everywhere I saw Srila Swami Maharaja and the Hare Krsna mantra.

"He used to say that his office was in Bombay, his place of bhajana was in Navadvipa, and his abode is Vrindavana. You cannot imagine how glorious he was. At the end of his manifest stay his disciples didn't understand what he wanted. He had told them, 'I want to die at Radha Kunda and Goverdhana.' This is a very high class of idea. I know he never dies, but like Srila Rupa Gosvami and Srila Raghunatha dasa Gosvami he wanted to leave his body in a holy place.

"In his last days he wept when he saw me. He was not talking with anyone, but he wanted to talk with me. He asked me to sit on his bed. I didn't sit on it; rather I did pranama to it. He put my hand on his hand and he told me that he had collected so many devotees from around the world, but he could not teach them fully. He requested me to continue the teaching of all his devotees. Very few took his internal mood, tan nama rupa caritadi sukratanu (NOI text 8), and therefore he requested me to teach all his disciples. He told me, 'Give me samadhi in Vrindavana. Wherever you like, it depends on you.' He ordered me to instruct the leaders, and so I talked with the GBC members and told them, 'Don't quarrel. Preach his mission. Give respect to juniors and seniors.' Many of them never did so, and they fell. To fulfill the desire of Srila Swami Maharaja I'm going around the world, and now some are realizing his real mission."

After Srila Maharaja's talk, both foreign and Indian devotees engaged in guru-puja, chanting of 'sri guru-carana-padma', and offering flowers, as Srila Maharaja performed the arati. After this

everyone partook of the breakfast feast in honor of Srila Prabhupada Bhaktivedanta Swami Maharaja, and then prepared for Nandotsava.

Sri Nandotsava

In the West it is customary to receive gifts on one's birthday. However, the Vedic custom is to distribute charity to others on one's birthday. In pursuance of this tradition Nanda Baba and Yasoda Maiya, the father and mother of Krsna, distribute charity on this day, the day after Sri Krsna Janmastami. Therefore, those who nurture lokika sad-bandhuvat sambandha (a natural relationship) with Krsna's family, spontaneously join in the festivities and distribute colossal amounts of maha-prasada to all the Vrajavasis.

Such festivals are extremely potent if performed in the Holy Dhama, under the guidance of a pure devotee. Sri Krsna has instructed Uddhava about this sure and swift method for attaining bhakti:

prthak satrena va mahyam
parva yatra MAHOTSAVAM
karayed gita nrtiyair
maharaja vibhutibhih

“One should celebrate, in public gatherings, those holy days and festivals set aside especially for My worship with singing, dancing and other grand arrangements of royal opulence.”

(Srimad Bhagavatam 11.29.11)

As usual, the maha-prasada distribution was on the scale of a military operation in which more than 15,000 jivas were given a chance to awaken their attraction to Krsna through the transcendental power of His remnants. For many weeks, the sannyasis and brahmacaris had been begging door to door in the blazing heat of the sun in order to collect the ingredients for Nanda Baba's festival. So many rooms had been filled with the collected provisions including:

105 x 15kg containers of vegetable oil.
x 15kg containers of pure ghee
20 x 100kg sacks of sugar
x 80kg sacks of flour
500kg rice

Then the cooking began, under the superintendence of Srimati Radharani. After four days and nights, all the ingredients were transformed into sabji, puspanna, kichories, puries, laddhu, bundi, chutney, fruit salad and other preparations that are very dear to Krsna. When all the preparations had been offered, the devotees opened the gates to let in the first four hundred pilgrims who had been patiently waiting outside. They were seated and served to their full satisfaction, and then they all filed out through the back gate. The entire Matha was then quickly cleansed from top to bottom and again the front gate was opened to let in the next four hundred guests. And so it went on for five hours. In addition to this, 5,000 parcels of maha-prasada preparations were prepared to be distributed to all the families, friends and well-wishers of the Matha who were unable to attend the festival. In this way the Grand Festival of Nanda Maharaja was celebrated with uncommon enthusiasm. The devotees who participated could not help but think that it must have been something like this in Nanda Gokula on this day during the manifest pastimes of Krsna. Thus, by the mercy of Nanda Baba and Yasoda Maiya, at least the

semblance of a greed to actually participate in that very festival in the not too distant future was awakened in the hearts of those who had tried their level best to make the festival a success for the pleasure of Krsna.

In the evening time, several prominent vaisnavas offered their sraddha puspanjali to Sri Sri Radha-Krsna by delivering enlightening discourses on the subject of Krsna-Tattva.

Finally, Srila Bhaktivedanta Narayana Maharaja announced the forthcoming SABHA or Distinguished Assembly, to be held at Sri Kesavaji Gaudiya Matha three days later. A report of that remarkable event follows.