

# **News from Badger, CA.**

## **A Report on Srila Bhaktivedanta Narayana Maharaja's visit to New Braj May 4-11, 2001**

Written by Brajendranandana dasa Adhikari and Madan Mohini dasi

Srila Bhaktivedanta Narayana Maharaja arrived in Badger, California -- 'New Braj' -- in the bright mid-morning sun on May 4th, 2001. The secluded township of Badger is nestled in the foothills of the Sierra Nevada Mountains. The 2 hour plus drive around the tight bends amidst the hills to the community of devotees is made pleasant by hillsides covered in springtime wildflowers and green forest. About 150 devotees had been chanting eagerly for some time in anticipation of his arrival, and when they saw the caravan of cars approaching, all enthusiastically ran down the driveway of Srila Narayana Maharaja's 'New Braj residence' -- the home of Sripad Nirguna dasa Adhikari and his family. The kirtana became ecstatic as Srila Narayana Maharaja stepped out of the car, and the crowd, both devotees and guests, spontaneously parted to create two long lines of which Srila Maharaja walked between, blessing everyone with his smiles and greetings. Then, in the large open-air pavilion, devotees performed a foot-bathing ceremony and Guru-puja. Shortly afterwards Srila Maharaja asked the hosts and some local devotees to speak something. Each stood and warmly greeted Srila Narayana Maharaja. They also welcomed Bhaktivedanta Madhava Maharaja, Bhaktivedanta Aranya Maharaja and the four hundred or so guests and devotees; local and those who travel with them.

Every evening, Srila Maharaja's classes were followed by dramas which were put on by the local devotees; 'The Life of Haridasa Thakura', and 'The Killing of Kamsa.' On May 6th Nrsimha Caturadasi, Srila Maharaja personally performed the abhiseka and arati of Lord Nrmhadeva and spoke extensively about the pastimes of Prahlad Maharaja. That evening there was a very expert drama performed on the pastimes of Lord Nrsimhadeva. Blessing all the players Srila Maharaja said, "I am very happy. I wanted dramas exactly like this." He explained how we should learn from the example of Prahlad Maharaja, "So that we can make a solid platform on which to develop our bhakti."

One other evening, several small skits depicting Radha-Krsna lila were presented by the younger children. While praising their efforts, Srila Maharaja pointed out that these lilas should not be performed -- by younger children especially. They are not qualified to understand the deep moods, and the lilas would thus be taken in a material way. He also strongly emphasized that these pastimes are not meant for general audiences. On the last night, His Holiness Aranya Maharaja performed "The Life of Raghunatha dasa Gosvami," which was so appreciated, that almost everyone was moved to tears.

May 7th, the Appearance Day of Srila Madhavendra Puri, Srila Maharaja celebrated Annakuta Mahotsava, the festival of worshipping Govadhana Hill. How was this possible? Four years earlier Srila Maharaja had installed Giriraja Govardhana into a huge boulder that was resting on the property of Sripad Nanda Gopal dasa and his family. Srila Maharaja performed the ancient Vedic prana-pratistha rights according to sastric rules and regulations. Srila Maharaja requested Giriraja Govardhana to descend from Goloka Vrndavana, thus, the presence of this glorious associate of Krsna was invoked. This year's festival seen Giriraja Govardhana surrounded by

flowering gardens and a newly manifest Radha Kunda and Syama Kunda. The evening before the festival, Srila Maharaja requested that at least 365 preparations be made to offer to Govardhana, but that morning saw there were more than 500 preparations waiting to be offered. Before the offering was to be made, the devotees joined together for a joyous nagara-sankirtana, and then, in keeping with Vrndavana style at the request of Srila Maharaja, they placed the plates on their heads and in this way carried them to Govardhana Hill. Once every preparation had been brought, Srila Maharaja performed the abhiseka of Giriraja as well as for several Govardhana Silas which devotees had brought for the ceremony. Several hundred devotees and guests watched happily as Srila Maharaja performed go-puja of Nanda Gopals family cow. She stood contentedly as she was garlanded and decorated with tumeric handprints. The devotees all cheered and laughed when, after arati, she greedily ate the maha flower that Srila Narayana Maharaja offered her. Then as Srila Maharaja followed by hundreds of devotees began to circumambulate Govardhana, the local children stopped him by performing the sweet pastime of the Krsna taxing the gopis, and the gopis in-turn taxing Him. As the kirtana went on the devotees and guests carried the preparations back the pavilion where mahaprasadam was served to everyone's full satisfaction.

Every morning Srila Narayana Maharaja was driven the few miles from Nirguna Prabhu's house to a place where he would take his morning walk. Accompanied by many of his devotees, he would walk down the quiet country road on which either side there was springtime green fields covered in wildflowers, big old trees, and the view of snow-capped mountains in the distance. The devotees present would later comment that it was reminiscent of Srila Prabhupada's walks -- full of transcendental instructions and sweet loving exchanges.

On one particular morning, everyone was surprised to see twenty or so cows from an adjacent farm following the entourage as they walked along the paved road. This was unusual as this type of cow which is kept for business purposes is usually scared and therefore runs away from people. As the cows began to come closer, several devotees became concerned and started to chase them away. But Srila Maharaja stopped them. He said, "These cows remember us from last year when we chanted to them. They could sense our love and affection and everyone is attracted by love and affection -- even animals."

Srila Maharaja then requested the devotees to sing a beautiful kirtan to the cows, and it was evident that they were soothed and attracted by the sound of Radha and Krsna's sweet names. Srila Maharaja explained that it troubled him to know that cows were to be slaughtered, although he realized that they were receiving the fruit of having been cow slaughterers in a previous life. He was anxious to give mercy to these living entities. For those present it was a glimpse into the causeless concern and compassion that the pure devotee has for all the embodied souls in this world.

On the morning of the 9th, Srila Maharaja visited his New Braj Village School -- the gurukula he had established in 1999. He was greeted by kirtana and arati by the twenty students and their teachers. Over 200 guests were present. The children recited slokas from the Nectar of Instruction and Bhagavad-gita. Srila Maharaja asked them to become very learned in the philosophy of Krsna Consciousness. He stressed that their teachers help them to develop good characters, to learn how to properly honor devotees. Concluding he said that gradually the school would grow and attract children from all over the world.

As in previous years, Srila Maharaja visited several devotees' homes where he spoke for a short time and honored mahaprasada. He also performed two marriage ceremonies for his disciples. He told them that they would never be happy, in millions of births by married life. Only bhakti and

bhajana of Radha and Krsna would make them happy, and therefore their relationship with one another should be to help each other in these matters.

The devotees and guests were happy and peaceful during the festival. Many complemented the devotees on their hospitality and sweet mood of the community. Srila Maharaja commented in one class that no one had come to him with any problems, therefore everyone must be happy and satisfied with the management of the festival.

Very early on the morning of the 11th, Srila Narayana Maharaja left for Los Angeles. There he gave a series of lectures at the Fu-Rama Hotel on Raya Ramanada Samvada. In the first class he said that he was happy to see that most of the devotees from New Braj had come to LA. He said that this was the symptom of taste in hearing -- that one will give up all their various material jobs and responsibilities just to go and hear hari- katha.