

SRI SATHYA SAI CENTRAL COUNCIL OF SOUTH AFRICA
National Spiritual Wing

Krishna Janmashtami

1. Name of religious event / Observance / Celebration:

Krishna Janmashtami / Gokulashtami

2. Picture:

2.1 Picture or symbol pertaining to the particular observance/celebration



2.2 The date/period of the religious event

Janmashtami is observed on the day when the ashtami tithi occurs at midnight during the Krishna Paksha (the dark fortnight of the month). If the ashtami tithi and the Rohini nakshatra occur on the same day, then the observance is considered to be most auspicious. Usually falls in late August or in early September or in the Indian lunar month of Shravana.

http://www.srisathyasai.org.in/Pages/AshramInfo/Sri_Krishna_Janmashtami.htm

3. About the festival:

In India, traditionally Krishnashtami is celebrated with much pomp and splendour by devotees. Celebrations are held on a grand scale in all Krishna temples, especially the ones in Vrindavan, Mathura (Uttar Pradesh), Dwaraka (Gujarat), and other regionally famous temples.

SRI SATHYA SAI CENTRAL COUNCIL OF SOUTH AFRICA National Spiritual Wing



"Today we celebrate Krishna's birthday. Where was he born? In a prison. What were his possessions? Nothing. Born in a prison, he was taken to the house of Nanda, and then he went to Mathura. He owned nothing. But he became the greatest figure in the world. What does this show? Worldly possessions are not the secret of greatness. Krishna's greatness consisted in His permanent state of bliss (*ananda*)"

The vrata mainly consists of fasting, spending the whole night in the worship of Krishna, reciting hymns of praise and Krishna's pastimes, reciting prayers from the Bhagavata, offering arghya to Krishna, and the parana or the ceremonial breaking of the fast. The next day is celebrated as Krishna Jayanti.

Mother Earth, unable to bear the burden of sins committed by evil kings and rulers, appealed to Brahma, the Creator for help. Brahma prayed to the Supreme Lord Vishnu, who assured him that he would soon be born on earth to annihilate tyrannical forces.

One such evil force was Kamsa, the ruler of Mathura (in northern India) and his people were utterly terrified of him. On the day Kamsa's sister Devaki was married off to Vasudeva, an *akashvani* or voice from the sky was heard prophesying that Devaki's 8th son would be the destroyer of Kamsa. The frightened Kamsa immediately unsheathed his sword to kill his sister but Vasudeva intervened and implored Kamsa to spare his bride, and promised to hand over every new born child to him. Kamsa relented but imprisoned both Devaki and her husband Vasudeva.

When Devaki gave birth to her first child, Kamsa came to the prison cell and slaughtered the newborn. In this way, he killed the first six sons of Devaki. Even before her 8th child was born, Devaki and Vasudeva started lamenting its fate and theirs. Then suddenly Lord Vishnu appeared before them and said he himself was coming to rescue them and the people of Mathura. He asked Vasudeva to carry him to the house of his friend, the cowherd chief Nanda in Gokula right after his birth, where Nanda's wife Yashoda had given birth to a daughter. He was to exchange his boy and bring Yashoda's baby daughter back to the prison. Vishnu assured them that "nothing shall bar your path".

At midnight on ashtami, the divine baby was born in Kamsa's prison. Remembering the divine instructions, Vasudeva clasped the child to his bosom and started for Gokula, but found that his legs were in chains. He jerked his legs and was unfettered! The massive iron-barred doors unlocked and opened up.

While crossing river Yamuna, Vasudeva held his baby high over his head. The rain fell in torrents and the river was in spate. But the water made way for Vasudeva and miraculously a five-mouthed snake followed him from behind and provided shelter over the baby.

When Vasudeva reached Gokula, he found the door of Nanda's house open. He exchanged the babies and hurried back to the prison of Kamsa with the baby girl. Early in the morning, all the people at Gokula rejoiced the birth of Nanda's beautiful male child. Vasudeva came back to Mathura and as he entered, the doors of the prison closed themselves.

When Kamsa came to know about the birth, he rushed inside the prison and tried to kill the baby. But this time it skipped from his hand and reaching the sky. She was transformed into the goddess Yogamaya, who told Kamsa: "O foolish! What will you get by killing me? Your nemesis is already born somewhere else."

http://www.srisathyasai.org.in/Pages/AshramInfo/Sri_Krishna_Janmashtami.htm

Symbolic:

The Krishna principle revels in delight. The incarnation of Krishna proclaimed the doctrine of divine love, as manifested by the cowherd maids (*gopikas*). The birth of Krishna is in itself a transcendental phenomenon that generates awe among the Hindus and overwhelms one and all with its supra mundane happenings.

Significance of Krishna Leela and devotion of Gopikas:

Gopikas had total devotion to Lord. Once Krishna feigned that he was suffering from a headache for which the cure was the application of the dust from the feet of a true devotee to his head. Sage Narada sought to collect the dust from Sathyabhama, Rukmini and others, whom he regarded as great devotees of the Lord. But all of them declined to give the dust to be placed on the Lord's head.

SRI SATHYA SAI CENTRAL COUNCIL OF SOUTH AFRICA
National Spiritual Wing

Ultimately Narada went to the gopikas, who did not have the slightest hesitation to offer the dust from their feet if only it would give immediate relief to the Lord, regardless of the consequences to themselves. They were only concerned with giving relief to their Lord by any means. They declared, "*Our entire life is dedicated to Krishna. His joy is ours.*"

Once Yashoda appealingly asked Krishna as to why he was going to the Gopikas' houses to steal their butter when there was so much butter in their own house. The Child Krishna replied 'Mother, I am not stealing butter but the hearts of the Gopis.' 'Their hearts are pure and full of devotion,' said Krishna. 'Their butter is filled with devotion with which they churn the buttermilk. Their bangles keep time as they sing Krishna's name while churning. The butter that is got contains the essence of the Vedas.' Krishna asked Yashoda whether this kind of churning was taking place in her house. In this manner, every word of Krishna was replete with spiritual significance.

"When Krishna went to visit a Gopika. Recognising that the Gopika was not at home, he broke the pot of the milk which was hanging from the roof and spilt the milk and went out of the house leaving footprints on the ground. The Gopika came back and found the footprints of Krishna. She followed the footprints of Krishna and found where he was.

Then Krishna said: 'If you desire to reach me, then you must follow my footprints and that is only way by which you can reach me..' Thus, Krishna was showing the method or path by which the devotees can reach him. Krishna was the one who showed the path of truth."

Kalinga,, had been occupying the river Yamuna and its banks. It poisoned the waters of the Yamuna and also dried the forests nearby by the poison airs breathed by it. The cattle that drank from the waters of Yamuna died from the poison .Krishna jumped into the water to kill the serpent, which coiled itself around the young Krishna. But very soon, the serpent king was overpowered by the Lord. Merciful that he is, Krishna spared Kalinga and told him to leave the shores of Yamuna forever. When kaaliya expressed his fear of Garuda, Lord Krishna replied, 'your hoods are marked with my footprints. Garuda will never touch you'.

Here the ego is compared to the serpent Kaalinga. When God comes down into a devotee the ego comes under control. When the devotee bows down in humility God takes him forever as His own and protects Him forever.

Indra, the king of gods, became angry when he learned that he was not the guest of honor at the Yajna performed by the inhabitants of Gokul since they believed that Krishna alone is the Supreme God. So he sent down a severe hail storm upon them. To teach Indra a lesson in humility, Krishna lifted up the Govardhana mountain with the little finger of His left hand and protected the cowherd citizens and their cattle and property from the storm.

The significance behind this leela: The mountain is compared to our problems in life. The men who carried the mountain thought that they were actually carrying it. Likewise we also feel that we are the ones who carry problems in life. It is not true. Like the Gopikas we feel we can solve the problems ourselves. But God is the real doer. He gives us opportunities to perform actions but actually does it himself.

Gopikas with Radha went to the banks of Yamuna and took turns in rowing the boat so that no single individual got tired. It was dark and they did not pay any special attention to other things and they were rowing in this manner all the night, yet they did not reach Mathura. As the day dawned, they found that people who were the residents of Gokulam were coming to the river. The boat

SRI SATHYA SAI CENTRAL COUNCIL OF SOUTH AFRICA
National Spiritual Wing

rowed all the night but they found that they were near Gokulam only. They found that they did not remove the rope which tied the boat to a post at the bank.

They only thought of Krishna and forgot about the bond that held the boat to the shore. Like the rope which held the boat, without removing the bondages with regard to our senses and organs; we will not be able to move forward. We must break these bonds to attain the Lord.

Uddava, when came among the Gopis, discovered that Krishna was roaming in their hearts without a moment's respite. They were seen scanning the dust on the roads to discover a foot print of Krishna, so that they could fall down and worship it.

Such was the devotion of Gopikas.

4. Suggested programme or method of observing the event:

Suggestion/Guide for South Africa at centre level (a programme):

- Conduct bhajans (3 Oms, bhajans, Aarathi)
- Have a talk on Krishna jayanthi for about 10 minutes.
- Our Bal Vikas children could present a short cultural item/s.
- Total duration 90 minute.

5. Verbal dedication / prayer / chant / other - with meanings:

Hare Krishna, Hare Krishna
Krishna Krishna, Hare Hare
Hare Rama, Hare Rama
Rama Rama, Hare Hare

These sixteen words--Hare Krishna, Hare Krishna, Krishna Krishna, Hare Hare/Hare Rama, Hare Rama, Rama Rama, Hare Hare--are especially meant for counteracting the ill effects of the present age of quarrel and anxiety. (*Kali-santarana Upanishad*)

bhajagovindam bhajagovindam
govindam bhajamuudhamate
sampraapte sannihite kaale
nahi nahi rakshati dukrijnkarane

Sing Govinda[Sing the lord's name], Sing Govinda's name, Sing Govinda's name. Oh fool! Rules of Grammar will not save you at the time of your death.

“The following are some of the common Names of Lord Krishna:

SRI SATHYA SAI CENTRAL COUNCIL OF SOUTH AFRICA

National Spiritual Wing



Krishna ,Jagannath,Parampurush,Dwarkadhish,Vasudev,Devki Nandan, Govinda, Gopal,
Parthasarthi, Muralidhar, Mathura Naresh, Damodar, Niranjan,Sanatan,Anant ,Ajay ,Murari
,KamalNath,Punya

<http://www.krishnajanmashtami.com/different-names-krishna.html>

6. Any personal offering / sacrifice / practice

Preparation of Sweets

According to legend, Lord Krishna was very fond of milk and milk products like butter and buttermilk. He was also fond of Sweets like Kheer, Pedhas etc. Therefore devotees all over make sweets during the festival to please the Lord.

Rituals in South India during Janmashtami

The houses in South India are beautifully decorated by women on Janmashtami. Various sweet meals are prepared and offered to the Lord. Butter, one of the favourite dishes of Lord Krishna is offered to please him in almost every house. The entire house right from the door to the temple is marked with the footprints of a child. Mixture of water and flour is used to make footprints. This custom creates a feeling of joy among the people as they feel Lord himself has blessed them by entering their homes. The day is marked with the ritual of chanting of the holy Bhagavatam, accompanied by singing of devotional songs and dances.

The cradle containing the divine infant's idol is rocked, conch is blown. Devotees sing Krishna arti, some people read out 108 names of lord. They get totally immersed in the name and praise of Gopal.

After the entire pooja is over, devotees break their fast by having panchamrit. The time of breaking the fast may vary, this is so, because the time of performing pooja also differs from place to place. While some devotees

<http://www.krishnajanmashtami.com/rituals-customs-janmashtami.html>

7. Other material for preparation / discussion:

Any other recommended material that could be used for additional information / preparation, such as VCDs, DVDS, books, charts, etc

8. Bibliography / Reference Section for all references used

http://www.srisathyasai.org.in/Pages/AshramInfo/Sri_Krishna_Janmashtami.htm

<http://www.krishnajanmashtami.com/rituals-customs-janmashtami.html>

9.Divine Discourse:

Today we celebrate Krishna's birthday. Where was he born? In a prison. What were his possessions? Nothing. Born in a prison, he was taken to the house of Nanda, and then he went to Mathura. He owned nothing. But he became the greatest figure in the world. What does this show? Worldly possessions are not the secret of greatness. Krishna's greatness consisted in His permanent state of bliss (**ananda**).

If you recognise the distinction between Krishna and Rama, you will appreciate Krishna's nature better. Krishna always smiled at the outset and carried out his task later. For Rama, the deed came first and then the smile. Krishna made women cry. Rama wept for the sake of women. Rama went into the battle only after having a strong cause for it. Krishna first provoked the conflict and then determined its outcome.

The Krishna principle revels in delight. The Rama principle is based on the concept of obligation (**baadhyatha**).

The *Ramayana* is intended to promote the reign of truth and righteousness on earth. The Krishna **Avatar** was intended to give a perennial message to the world. He sought nothing for himself. He kept nothing for himself. He gave away everything to the people. He slayed his maternal uncle, Kamsa. He installed Kamsa's father, Ugrasena, on the throne. He did not covet the kingdom. He befriended the Pandavas, defeated the Kauravas, and crowned Dharmaja as the emperor. He did not make himself king. He was a king without a crown. He was the king of kings. He had no kingdom of his own. But he ruled over the hearts of the millions. It is this profound truth that is proclaimed by the Krishna principle (Krishna **thathva**).

If you enquire deeply, you will find that every **Avatar** has incarnated to convey a special message and carry out a particular mission.

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Divine Discourse: Sri Krishna Janmashtami, 4 September 1996

The incarnation of Krishna proclaimed the doctrine of divine love, as manifested by the cowherd maids (*gopikas*). Today, man is like an earthen pot filled with nectar. His body may be made of clay, but his spirit is eternal. The Divine has to be experienced through the body. Hence, human birth should not be treated as something trivial. Human life is worth living - it should be cherished as something precious.

But today, such a precious gift is being treated as dirt. It is essential to realise the value of human existence. What is the goal of human life? It is to go back to the source from which we came. Our duty is to return to our primordial, original home.

All of you who are here have come from different parts of India and the world. After your stay here, you have to go back to your native places. Likewise, human beings have come to the planet earth as pilgrims. They have to return to their original home. You have come from the *Atma*. You have to go back to the *Atma*. You have come from the Brahman (Supreme Self). You have to merge in the Brahman. You have incarnated as a spark of Brahman. You have to become the Brahman. That is the ideal. That is the goal. In between, there may be many impediments. You should ignore them. Have unshakable faith. That is true devotion.

Divine Discourse: Sri Krishna Janmashtami, 18 August 1995

Whatever you do, remember the Omnipresence of the Divine. Do every act to please God, out of love and not out of compulsion. Divinise every act. The Lord declares in the *Gita*, "Having been born in this transient and unhappy world, worship Me."

Krishna called upon Arjuna to stand up and face the battle, reminding him of what was in store for the evil minded Kauravas. He adjured Arjuna to have full faith in Him and do his duty. Then Arjuna declared, "I shall do as You bid me (*Karishyevachanam thava*)." Then Krishna declared, "You have now become My true devotee." And He exhorted Arjuna to rise and fight the battle, which would end in the complete destruction of the Kauravas and the wicked quartet, Duryodhana, Dussasana, Karna, and Sakuni.

The great teaching of the *Gita* is this: Put your trust in God, carry on your duties, be helpful to everyone, and sanctify your lives. Dedicate all actions to God. That is the way to experience oneness with God. God is in you. You are in God. This oneness is the basic truth. Chant the name of the Lord and render social service in a spirit of selflessness and devotion to God.

Divine Discourse: Sri Krishna Janmashtami, 18 August 1995

Krishna is omnipresent. The word has three meanings:

- (1) *Krishithi-ithi Krishna* --The man who ploughs is Krishna. The heart is the symbol of a field. The heart should be cleared of weeds (evil qualities). It should be filled with love. The seeds of the Lord's name should be sown in it. Krishna encourages the devotee to do all this.
- (2) *Karshathi-ithi Krishna* --Because he attracts, he is Krishna. Krishna has the supreme power of attraction. By his words, his sport, his music, and all his actions he attracts all people. This power of attraction is present in everyone. Hence, everyone is potentially Krishna.
- (3) *Krushyathi-ithi Krishnah* --Because he imparts bliss, he is called Krishna. Everyone seeks happiness. The Divine, who is the embodiment of happiness, is in you. God wants you to be happy, but you do not realize it. Try to recognize the source of bliss within you. It is not the true nature of man to be unhappy. When anyone is otherwise, people around him are concerned about him. You should always be happy, because you are the embodiment of the *Atma*. Never give way to worry.

As a spark of the Divine, you have to behave like the Divine. Do not give room for grief. What use is there in turning over the beads of the rosary while your mind is thinking of mundane matters? First of all, purify your mind. Dedicate all actions to God. Free yourself from all attachments. Treat all things as gifts from God for which you are the guardian and not the owner.

Divine Discourse: Sri Krishna Janmashtami, 25 August 1997

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