Festivals: Krishna Jayanti
Category : April/May/June 2010
Published by senthil on Mar. 02, 2010

Krishna Jayanti
Birthday of the God of Divine Love

Krishna, the preeminent incarnation of God Vishnu, lived life to the fullest. He had divine wisdom, charisma and power, but He also enjoyed mischief, games and the company of His beloved Radha. He was the protagonist in an epic war, inspiring by speech and example. Above all, He is known for loving every living being, for He is every one of them. It is His extraordinary life that Hindus celebrate in this birthday festival of fasting, devotion, drama and games.

Who is Krishna?

Born in a royal family, Krishna was the son of Devaki and Vasudeva. He is the noble philosopher, born to relieve this world of all evil. He is the divine child who brings laughter, love and beauty into life. He is the celestial charioteer whose discourse on dharma to the warrior Arjuna is the heart of the Bhagavad Gita. He is the all-knowing Deity at whose feet devotees lay their troubles. To chant "Krishna Arpanam" is to offer everything in complete surrender to Him with full faith that He will take care of it. It is said that in a grand, cosmic leela, or play, He creates illusions around us to catalyze learning and realization. Killed by an arrow as He slept in a field of grass, He left this Earth at the end of the Dwapara Yuga, and upon His death some 5,000 years ago our present era began.

What is Krishna Jayanti?

Jayanti means birth, and Krishna Jayanti is the Lord's birthday. The festival is also called Krishna Janmashtami, indicating His birth on the eighth day of the waning moon in the month of Shravana (August/September).

What do people do on Krishna Jayanti?

Anticipating the birth of the divine child, devotees prepare their home shrines with images of Krishna decorated with flowers (particularly tulsi) and lavishly adorned with jewels. The whole house is made festive with rangoli designs, lights and

fragrant flowers festooning doorways. The discipline is to fast during the previous day and keep an all-night vigil. Families and communities sing and dance late into the night as bards recall Krishna's youthful antics, His passionate love for Radha and His precious teachings. At midnight, the time He was born, a statue of the infant Krishna is bathed, dressed in new clothes, placed in a cradle and worshiped in an elaborate puja. The fast is then broken, and devotees celebrate and feast for hours. At dawn, women paint baby footprints on the floor leading to the shrine room, a sign that Krishna has entered their home.

How do devotees relate to Krishna?

Interaction with Krishna is always personal. Depending on the devotee, the love inspired by the Divine energy that is Krishna is like that of a mother for a child, a teen friend for another, a lover for a life partner. To many, Krishna is the ultimate mentor and refuge in challenging, soul-searching times. He reminds us of our dharma, or duty, and explains the philosophical choices we have in life. Ultimately, Krishna shows us the path to God Realization.

Tidbits About Lord Krishna

In what ways is Krishna portrayed? Krishna is normally seen as a young cowherd playing a flute, illustrating His days as a carefree youth who whittled reeds into flutes and enchanted the world with music. As an infant, paintings show Him crawling or holding a ball of butter. As a young man, He is the perfect lover. As an adult, He is Arjuna's wise charioteer on the Mahabharata battlefield. Krishna literally means dark. It is said He is so dark that His skin has a bluish sheen.

Who are the women in Krishna's life? Radha is the lovely young woman Krishna loved. She represents the devotee, loved by Krishna. Rukmini is Krishna's soft, gentle and beautiful wife. Satyabhama, another wife, is a brave, daring warrior. On moonlit nights, Krishna dances with the gopis, lovely maiden cowherds. Krishna's myriad amorous encounters symbolize the infinite capacity of His love, indicating that each of us, no matter how common, can simultaneously be one with the Lord.

What is the handi competition? Reenacting the story of Krishna and His playmates absconding with earthen pots of buttermilk, called handi, young men in Maharashtra form human pyramids to reach a high-hung pot of buttermilk and break it with a blunt object, spilling the liquid on all below. Handis are set up in various parts of cities, and teams travel around in trucks competing, as young men

do, to break as many as possible, especially those that promise hefty rewards.

Pancha Kajjaya

This sweet, crunchy salad is enjoyed as a snack or an exotic side dish

Preparation time: 30 minutes.

Cooking time: 10 minutes

Serves: 6-8

Ingredients

4 cups thin beaten rice (poha);

4 cups grated coconut--preferably fresh, but frozen will work. If using dry coconut, soak in water for 1 hour and squeeze out.

1 to 2 cups powdered jaggery, 4 tbsp white sesame seeds, 1 tsp cardamom powder, 2 tbsp honey

Method

1. Mix rice with the grated coconut and set aside for 30 minutes.

2. Add the rest of the ingredients and mix.

3. Arrange in a shallow dish and pour about 2 tbsp of honey over it.

4. Decorate with thin slices of ripe banana.

Tip: Use only the very thin, light poha. The thicker variety remains hard in the end product and does not absorb the honey.

Fact & Fiction

FACT: It is widely believed that Krishna was an historical figure, though the date of His birth is disputed. Marine archaeologists have recently found compelling evidence of Dvaraka, the capital of His ancient kingdom. Underwater ruins discovered off the coast of Gujarat match descriptions of the city from the epic Mahabharata.

FICTION: A cursory exploration of Hinduism can make it seem superficial, since much of its popular practice, including its festivals, is grounded in a rich treasury of stories, legends and mythology from the Puranas and the epics. In truth, underpinning this delightful literary lore is a deeply mystical nature, vast and comprehensive philosophies, sophisticated systems of yoga and scriptures of peerless profundity.

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