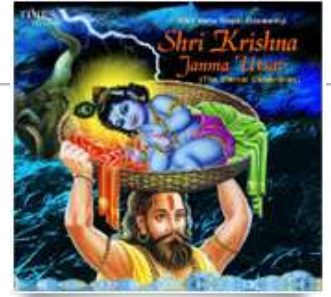


# Janmastami

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## What is Janmashtami?

Janmashtami commemorates the earthly appearance of Krishna, who is described in India's sacred writings as God Himself. One of the biggest religious festivals in the world, it is celebrated by nine hundred and thirty million people around the world--and two million in the US alone. To devotees, it's Christmas and New Year's in one, a day of deep spiritual renewal and celebration that effectively finishes an old year and begins a fresh one. But why Janmashtami, you may ask? What's so special about Krishna, as opposed to any other form of God? It's His personable-ness. He reciprocates in unique, personal ways with every devotee who offers Him love—He is the most adorable, mischievous son, the most romantic lover, the most compassionate friend. And on Janmashtami, devotees celebrate Krishna in all of these aspects. For just as Krishna reciprocates individually with His relatives and confidantes, he responds to the distinct feelings and desires held most deeply in the heart of every single worshipper. So remember that whatever way you worship Krishna on Janmashtami, He will reciprocate with you accordingly. It's a meditation that makes for an extremely rewarding devotional experience.

## How is Janmashtami Celebrated?

Where Vaishnava temples exist, festivities begin before dawn and extend all day until midnight, the exact moment of the anniversary of Krishna's appearance. Events include kirtan, singing the Lord's name along with other devotees; and japa, private, more intimate prayer. Some devotees cook a feast of over one hundred dishes, while others perform drama and dance. Some clothe and decorate the deity of Krishna while others string enormous flower garlands and other decorations for the temple. Incense burns, scriptures are read, and all but the young and the infirm fast all day. The deities are also bathed with a variety of auspicious liquids in a kind of ablution ceremony called abhisheka. Sometimes taking over two hours, this is performed with great pomp. Finally, at midnight, priests pull apart the curtains to reveal the freshly dressed deity of Krishna on a creatively festooned and colored altar. The excitement builds, and a rousing kirtan ensues.

## How to Celebrate Janmashtami at Home

But what if you don't live near a temple? What if you can't make it to a major celebration? Does that mean you can't observe Janmashtami? Of course not. It is our sincere devotion that pleases Krishna most, and this can be offered anywhere. So to help you feel more connected to the Lord and His devotees on this special day, here are Krishna.com's tips on how to celebrate Janmashtami at home:

- Invite all your friends and family to participate in the festivities.
- Decorating your home for Krishna can be fun, particularly for children. Encourage them in helping to make garlands, hanging balloons and festoons of leaves, and generally making the house beautiful for Krishna's appearance.
- Get a copy of the Vaishnava Songbook and choose some of your favorite bhajanas (devotional songs in praise of God) to sing. Krishna, also known as Murlidhara, or "one who holds the flute," loves music. And so will your friends and family, as you take turns singing and playing instruments. Alternatively, play bhajan CDs and heighten the spiritual atmosphere.
- You can also chant extra rounds of the Hare Krishnamaha-mantra on your japa mala (prayer beads). This is an intimate one on one exchange with Krishna, and makes you feel much closer to the Lord.
- Read the story of Krishna's advent and other exciting pastimes from Krishna, the Supreme Personality of Godhead or Srimad Bhagavatam, Canto Ten. Pass the book around, and try dramatic readings to bring the story to life. Janmashtami is all about completely immersing yourself in thoughts of Krishna in a festive way.
- If you have Radha-Krishna deities, get extra special new outfits for them. Exercise your creativity and pay special attention to decorating their altar.
- Recreate the temple program and hold an abhisheka bathing ceremony for your deities. Simply buy different liquids like yogurt, honey, ghee and fruit juices and bathe the deity with them while singing devotional songs.
- Temples prepare at least one hundred and eight different food dishes on Janmashtami. Of course, you don't have to go that far, unless you're feeling particularly energetic! But it's always nice to cook some very special preparations to offer to the Lord. Imagine that Krishna was actually right there, in your house—what would you offer Him? This makes for a wonderful meditation while cooking on Janmashtami.
- Have a midnight arati (worship ceremony) with a kirtan. This is the exact time that Krishna appeared on this planet, so it is most auspicious and spiritually inspiring. If you have arati paraphernalia, then you can do a full offering. If not, don't worry—Krishna says in Bhagavad-gita, "If you offer Me with love a leaf, flower, fruit or water, I will accept it." So offer whatever you can—it's your love and devotion that matters.
- Tune into Krishna.com's webcams and watch the festivities going on at some of ISKCON's major temples.
- Buy a special gift for the Lord. You can wrap it and write a card to Krishna. Here are some gift ideas:

■ If you have Deities you can buy or make jewelry, new clothes, garlands, peacock feathers, turban pieces, flutes or water cups

■ Incense

■ Fruit basket

■ Offering plate

■ New picture frame if you worship a picture of Krishna

■ Brand new aratiset

■ If you are able to fast from food, fasting until midnight is recommended. If fasting is too difficult, then try to eat only light foods during the day. By putting our own needs aside and concentrating more on Krishna's, we show our love for Him.

As you celebrate Janmashtami, remember that just as we enjoy the attention and fun on our birthday, so the Lord also enjoys our attention and gifts on His appearance day. The difference between us and Krishna is that He is able to reciprocate perfectly with each one of us. In the transcendental realm, everything that we offer to the Lord with love and devotion will benefit us unlimitedly, and those benefits will stay with us for eternity.