

**Janmashtami**  
**Commemorative Service Reading**  
**Volume I**

## Commemorative Service Readings

Please use the reading from the volume appropriate for the year in which you are reading. The volume number of the commemorative service readings must match the volume number of the Sunday service readings.

There are two colors of font — black and blue. Black indicates a section created by the reader as an introduction, transition, or summary. These may be altered to suit your reading style. Blue indicates material taken from an SRF sources, such as *Autobiography of a Yogi*, *Mejda*, *Self-Realization Magazine*, etc. These are not to be changed. If you find an error, please notify the chairperson of the readers' committee for correction.

At the end of quoted material there is usually the source and page number from which the material is taken. This is for your information only and is not to be read.

# Janmashtami

## Reading

### Volume I

(There are many Indian names and words in this reading. Please refer to the pronunciation guide at the end of the reading for the correct pronunciation.)

The following reading is a condensation of the article entitled "An Avatar is Born" found in the Self-Realization Magazine, summer, 1999 and tells the story of the birth of Lord Krishna.

Davaki was cousin to the evil king, Kamsa who ruled in India many thousand of years ago in the city of Mathura. On her wedding day, Kamsa chauffeured his cousin and her husband, Vasudeva, in his personal chariot to their new home. The cheering throngs on the streets pleased the king. "I'm the monarch of all I survey," he thought. "Silly saint Madhuka, to invoke the name of a nonexistent God against me just because I made him pull my chariot like a horse." Then all of a sudden came a voice out of everywhere and nowhere, uttering words that chilled his heart: "Fool! The eighth child of this very woman will spell your doom." In a flash, Kamsa bounded into the chariot, sword unsheathed. But the quick-witted Vasudeva entreated the king to spare Devaki's life, promising that they would hand over all their children to the king. To ensure that Vasudeva kept his word, the couple was thrown into the palace dungeon.

As each baby was born, Kamsa swiftly dispatched it by whirling it in the air by its legs and dashing it against a boulder. Six babies thus had but a few brief moments on earth. By the Lord's will, Devaki's seventh child was transferred to the womb of Rohini, one of the wives of Nanda,

a cowherd chief who lived in Gokulam on the opposite bank of the Yamuna. Kamsa was told that Devaki had miscarried, and he was satisfied.

Now on ashtami day, the eighth day of the waning moon, in the month of Sravan, Devaki's eighth child was born at the stroke of midnight. Strange omens preceded the birth. Flowers that folded their petals at sundown bloomed again, filling the night air with sweet fragrance.

Birds awoke and chirped joyfully. Peacocks spread their magnificent plumage and danced- as clouds showered gentle rain on the parched earth.

Before Vasudeva and Devaki's astonished eyes, the infant change into a beautiful, dark youth with a smiling face and lustrous eyes. "Mother, father, you are not dreaming. This is how I will be in a few years. I have taken this form to communicate with you and will soon revert to my infant form. Father, there is no time to lose. You must take me at once to Gokulam to the home of Nanda, the chieftain of the cowherds. His wife Yashoda has given birth to a little girl. Bring that baby back to Mathura and leave me in her place."

With a beatific smile, the youth became a baby again, leaving Vasudeva and Devaki mightily perplexed because Gokulam was on the opposite bank of the Yamuna and they were fettered in a prison under heavy guard. Then Vasudeva noticed his shackles had mysteriously come undone; the bolts on the door had withdrawn from their sockets; the door was silently swinging on its hinges. Lulled by the cool air, the guards were fast asleep.

Quickly Vasudeva was out on the street. The mellow rain of the early evening had become a torrential downpour. Windows were closed

because of the heavy rain; everybody was snug and cozy in their homes. No one saw a man with a baby slip quietly down the soggy city streets. It seemed as though the improbable escape might succeed!

But the downpour had swelled the river waters; the Yamuna was in flood. Crossing it would be impossible — they would be swept away. I must go on, decided Vasudeva, plunging into the water. As he entered the river, the baby's foot touched the water. And with a mighty whoosh, the waters miraculously parted as though some giant invisible force had descended from on high, clearing a path across the riverbed

Quickly Vasudeva switched the babies in Nanda's house and hurried back across the river. Once inside the prison cell, the bolts slipped back into their sockets, the shackles snapped back on his limbs, the puddles of water that had dripped on the floor dried up. And the baby began to wail, waking up the guards who ran helter-skelter to the palace to inform the king that Devaki's eighth child was born. Kamsa rushed to the prison and was utterly taken aback to discover that the baby was a girl. Davaki implored him to spare the child and for a moment, the king wavered. But only for a moment. "I don't care if it's a girl or a boy," he roared. "It's your eighth child. That's all that matters."

But as he twirled the baby in rage, it slipped from his hands and flew into the air. Before the king's dumbfounded gaze, it dematerialized and took the form of the Divine Mother in the aspect of the destroyer of evil and delusion. "You cannot destroy souls the way you have killed these children," she told him, sternly and sorrowfully. "Neither can you destroy truth. The child destined to rid the world of your tyranny is very much alive."

The great sage Gargacharya(Gar-gah-char'-ya) was summoned to name Nanda's children. "Rohini's son will be a man of great strength so

we will call him Balarama.” "And Yashoda's son is dark in complexion and full of charm, so he will be called - Krishna." (P. 29 ff.)

The poem "Come to me, O Krishna" is from *Whispers from Eternity* and was written by Paramahansa Yogananda in honor of Lord Krishna. Look with attention at the picture of Lord Krishna while a portion of this poem is read as a prayer as though you yourself are addressing these words to him.

“O Krishna, Lord of Hindustan, I sorrowed by the lonely Junma river bank, where Thy flute-notes thrilled the air and led the lost calves to their homes....

I am one of Thy lost calves which followed Thy flower-footprints on the shoals of time. Listening to the melody of Thy flute of wisdom, I am following the middle path of calm activity, by which Thou hast led many through the portals of the dark past into the light.

Since all of us are Thy fold, whether moving, sidetracked, or held stationary by the fogs of disbelief, O Divine Krishna, lead us back to Thy fold of everlasting freedom. O Krishna, Thou reignest on the heart-throne of each knower of Thy love.” (PP. 50 ,51)

## Pronunciation Guide

Kamsa: Kahm'-sah

Ugrasena: oog-rah'-senah (oo=sound in too)

Narayana: Nah-ri-an'-uh

Trivikrama: Tree-vic'-rama

Devaki: Day-vah'-key

Vasudva: Vah-sue-de'-vah

Gokulam: Go-koo'-lum

Rohini: Ro-he-nee (long sound of o & e)

Gargacharya: Gar-gah-char'-ya