

The Glories of Spiritual Food

Caitanya-caritāmṛta is a set of books written about the pastimes of Lord Caitanya Mahāprabhu and His devotees just over 500 years ago. There are many pastimes involving spiritual food, and the joy and interactions around the honoring of prasādam. We will find many nectarean references in Caitanya-caritāmṛta about prasādam.

Caitanya-caritāmṛta, Madhya-līlā, chapter 14, text 36, states-

“Indeed, Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu was fully satisfied just to see how Lord Jagannātha accepted all the food.”

In Śrīla Prabhupāda’s purport to that verse, we learn-

“Following in the footsteps of Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu, a Vaiṣṇava should be fully satisfied simply to see a variety of food offered to the Deity of Jagannātha or Rādhā-Krishna. A Vaiṣṇava should not hunger for a variety of food for his own sake; rather, his satisfaction is in seeing various foods being offered to the Deity.”

In his Gurv-aṣṭaka, Śrīla Viśvanātha Cakravartī Ṭhākura writes:

catur-vidha-śrī-bhagavat-prasāda-
svādv-anna-trptān hari-bhakta-saṅghān
kṛtvaiva trptim bhajataḥ sadaiva
vande guroḥ śrī-caraṇāravindam

“The spiritual master is always offering Krishna four kinds of delicious food [analyzed as that which is licked, chewed, drunk and sucked]. When the spiritual master sees that the devotees are satisfied by eating bhagavat-prasādam, he is satisfied. I offer my respectful obeisances unto the lotus feet of such a spiritual master.

The spiritual master’s duty is to engage his disciples in preparing varieties of nice foods to offer the

Deity. After being offered, this food is distributed as prasādam to the devotees. These activities satisfy the spiritual master, although he himself does not eat or require such a variety of prasādam. By seeing to the offering and distribution of prasādam, he himself is encouraged in devotional service.”

Caitanya-caritāmṛta, Madhya-līlā, chapter 11, text 209, states-

“They ate all kinds of cakes and sweet rice, filling themselves up to their throats, and at intervals they vibrated the holy name of the Lord in great jubilation.”

In the purport, we read-

“It is the practice of Vaiṣṇavas while taking prasādam to chant the holy name of Lord Hari at intervals and also sing various songs, such as śārīra avidyā-jāla. Those who are honoring prasādam, accepting the remnants of food offered to the Deity, must always remember that prasādam is not ordinary food. Prasādam is transcendental.”

We are therefore reminded:

mahā-prasāde govinde nāma-brahmaṇi vaiṣṇave
sv-alpa-puṇya-vatām rājan viśvāso naiva jāyate

“Those who are not pious cannot understand the value of mahā-prasādam or the holy name of the Lord. Both prasādam and the Lord’s name are on the Brahman platform, or spiritual platform. One should never consider prasādam to be like ordinary hotel cooking. Nor should one touch any kind of food not offered to the Deity. Every Vaiṣṇava strictly follows this principle and does not accept any food that is not prasādam. One should take prasādam with great faith and should chant the holy name of the Lord and worship the Deity in the temple, always remembering that the Deity, mahā-prasādam and the holy name do not belong to the mundane platform. By worshipping

the Deity, eating prasādam and chanting the Hare Krishna mahā-mantra, one can always remain on the spiritual platform (brahma-bhūyāya kalpate).”

Caitanya-caritāmṛta, Antya-līlā, chapter 1, text 92, states-

“The river Ganges flowing in the heavenly planets is full of golden lotus flowers, and we, the residents of those planets, eat the stems of the flowers. Thus we are very beautiful, more so than the inhabitants of any other planet. This is due to the law of cause and effect, for if one eats food in the mode of goodness, the mode of goodness increases the beauty of his body.”

Purport

“One’s bodily luster and beauty, one’s constitution, one’s activities and one’s qualities all depend on the law of cause and effect. There are three qualities in material nature, and as stated in the Bhagavad-gītā (13.22), kāraṇaṁ guṇa-saṅgo ’sya sad-asad-yoni-janmasu: one takes birth in a good or bad family according to his previous association with the qualities of material nature. Therefore one seriously eager to achieve transcendental perfection, Krishna consciousness, must eat Krishna-prasādam. Such food is sāttvika, or in the material quality of goodness, but when offered to Krishna it becomes transcendental. Our Krishna consciousness movement distributes Krishna-prasādam, and those who eat such transcendental food are sure to become devotees of the Lord. This is a very scientific method, as stated in this verse from Nala-naiṣadha (3.17): kāryaṁ nidānād dhi guṇān adhīte. If in all his activities a person strictly adheres to the mode of goodness, he will certainly develop his dormant Krishna consciousness and ultimately become a pure devotee of Lord Krishna.”

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