Relishing the sacred food of Krishna *prasadam* purifies our heart and protects us from falling into illusion. In this way, the devotee imbibes the spiritual potency of Lord Krishna and becomes cleansed of sinful reactions by eating food that is first offered in sacrifice to God. We thus also become free from reincarnation, the continued cycle of life and death. This process prepares us for entering the spiritual world since the devotees there also relish eating in the company of Krishna.

Not only do we make advancement, but all of the plants that are used in the preparations as an offering to God are also purified and reap spiritual benefit. However, we become implicated in karma if we cause the harm of any living being, even plants, if we use them for food without offering them to God. Thus *prasadam* also becomes the perfect yoga diet.

Therefore, the cooking, the offering and then the respectful eating or honoring of this spiritualized food all become a part of the joyful process of devotional service to the Lord. Anyone can learn to do this and enjoy the happiness of experiencing *prasadam*. The Sunday love feast in the Hare Krishna temples is the opportunity in which everyone can participate in

this opulence of Lord Krishna. So we invite you to attend as often as you like and make spiritual advancement simply by relishing Krishna *prasadam*.



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## Prasadam: The Power of Sacred Food

On the spiritual path those who are most inclined to lead a peaceful existence that respects the value of all life often adopt the vegetarian lifestyle. It is in accordance with the yogic principle of ahimsa, which is to observe nonviolence and abstain from injuring any being in any way. However, in the process of bhaktiyoga, devotion goes beyond simple vegetarianism, and food becomes a method of spiritual progress. In the Krishna temples, food is offered to the Deities in a special sacrament, after which it becomes prasadam. This means the mercy of the Lord. Thus, the food we eat after it is offered to the Lord becomes a means for our purification and spiritual development.

Devotional service or Krishna consciousness is often described as a process of singing, dancing and feasting. But the feasting is done with spiritual food, Krishna prasadam.

In the *Bhagavad-gita* Lord Krishna says, "All that you do, all

that you eat, all that you offer and give away, as well as all austerities that you may perform, should be done as an offering unto Me." So offering what we eat to the Lord is an integral part of bhakti-yoga and makes the food blessed with spiritual potencies. Then such food is called *prasadam*, or the mercy of the Lord.



The Lord also describes what He accepts as offerings: "If one offers Me with love and devotion a leaf, a flower, fruit or water, I will accept it." Thus, we can see that the Lord does not need anything, but if one offers fruits, grains, and vegetarian foods, He will accept it. The Lord does not accept foods like meat, fish or eggs, but only those that are pure and naturally available without harming others. So we offer what Krishna likes, not those items which are distasteful to Him. We also do not use garlic, onions, or mushrooms when we prepare food for Krishna.

The Lord is fully satisfied in Himself. He is the creator of all so everything is already His. He supplies us with food through nature, but we give thanks to Him by offering it back in a mood of loving devotion. So if His devotee offers something with love, out of His causeless mercy Krishna accepts it. The Lord is never hungry for our food, but for the love and devotion we offer. And then He reciprocates with that love.

So on the spiritual path eating food that is first offered to God is the ultimate perfection of a vegetarian diet. The Vedic literature explains that the purpose of human life is reawakening the soul's original relationship with God, and accepting *prasadam* is the way to help us reach that goal.

The food is meant to be cooked with the consciousness of love, knowing that it will be offered to Lord Krishna. In the spiritual world, Radharani cooks for Krishna and She never cooks the same preparation twice. The temple kitchen is understood to belong to Radharani.

The ingredients are selected with great care and must be fresh, clean and pure vegetarian. Also, in cooking for Krishna we do not taste the preparations while cooking. We

leave the first taste for Krishna when it is offered

After all the preparations are ready, we take a portion of each one and place it in bowls on a special plate and take it to the altar to offer it to the Deities or pictures of Krishna.

Then the preparations are presented with special prayers as we ask that God accept our humble offering. The Lord accepts it with the most important part being the love with which it is offered. God does not need to eat, but it is our love for God which attracts Him to us and to accept our offering. Even if the most sumptuous banquet is offered to God but without devotion and love, Krishna will not be hungry to accept it. It is our love which catches the attention of Lord Krishna, who is then inclined to accept our service.

After He glances over and tastes that loving offering of vegetarian preparations, He leaves the remnants for us to honor and relish. Krishna's potency is absorbed in that food. In this way material substance becomes spiritualized, which then affects our body and mind in a similar way. This is His special mercy for us. Thus, the devotional process becomes an exchange of love between us and God, which includes food. And that food not only nourishes our body, but also purifies our consciousness.