

Devasadan Mandir Monthly

Ramananda Raya

Your unqualified author, Naman gupta

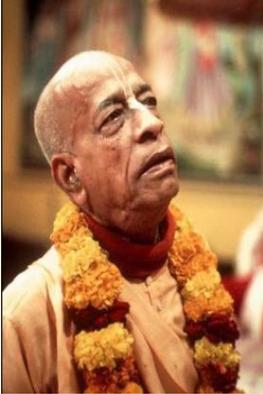
June 23, 2010

Upcoming Events

July 17th – Snan Yatra
July 24th – Rath Yatra

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information

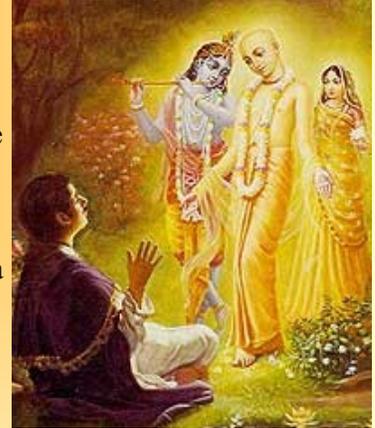
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This year on June 1st, we observed the disappearance of Sri Ramananda Raya. So I wanted to know who is Sri Ramananda Raya? We are fortunate to have so many acharyas who have worked hard and guided us in different ways to help us achieve our spiritual goal. I am presenting a brief account about the glories of one of our very special acharya, Sri Ramananda Raya.

He is one of Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu's most confidential associates. In Krishna-Lila Ramananda Raya is the gopi Visakha, one of the most confidential associates (a close friend) of Srimati Radharani and Krishna. Spiritually, Visakha enjoyed a very deep relationship with both Sri Krishna and Sri Radha. The first meeting between Lord Caitanya and Ramananda Raya was on the banks of the Godavari river. Their meeting is beautifully described in Sri Caitanya-caritamrta. After their initial meeting they were attracted to each other and decided to meet again in the evening to discuss confidential topics of Krishna. Their discussions are called *Ramananda-samvada*.

In this discussion between Sri Ramananda Raya and Caitanya Mahaprabhu, Lord Caitanya took the position of the student, or questioner, and Ramananda Raya was obliged to take the position of the teacher. Ramananda Raya was hesitant to accept this role. He was a Grihastha and was considered a Sudra. Mahaprabhu told him it doesn't matter whether one is a brahmana, sudra, a sannyasi, or whatever. He said anyone who knows Krishna is a guru.



Ramananda Raya approached Sri Caitanya respectfully and then they began to discuss about the ultimate goal of life and Krishna in a quiet place. After a long and serious discussion Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu out of His kindness showed His combined form of Radha and Krishna (Rasaraja and Mahabhava). Seeing this form of the Lord, Ramananda Raya became blissful.

I sincerely aspire to read the *Ramananda-samvada* some day. I offer my humble obeisances to Sri Ramananda Raya and all our acharyas who have worked hard to improve our spiritual lives.

Once in a Lifetime

The brilliant sun gently tugged me out of my bumpy nap, and the discomfort of my raging red inner eyelids brought me to consciousness. I rubbed the sleep out of my eyes and peered through the dim car window, trying to make out the blurry shapes as the car gradually slowed down. My contacts refocused as my dad pulled into an empty parking space on a grassy field. Trying to make my hair look presentable, I opened the glossy black car door, letting loose cascades of cool, luxurious air into pure steaming, Alachua. Whoa, the humidity hit hard. I stepped onto uncharacteristically soft, plush grass and peeked up at the pleasant, shimmering sun. I turned and absentmindedly fixed my sister's ponytail at her cheeky request, watching my dad already introducing himself to some senior devotees.

"I knew this Prabhu from Seattle, and Mathaji too! They used to visit very often," he was telling my mom. I offered my *dandavats* at their lotus feet along with my sister, as my father continued to glorify them. I smiled at them as they reminisced in the old memories he spoke of so fondly. They seemed to bring the memories alive, fresh with emotion onto their beaming faces. They told us they lived here now, and led us up a beaten, grassy path, to a charming courtyard. It was fenced in with a lovely worn wooden railing and devotees of all colors, shapes, and sizes were strolling around, some with their beads and others with adorable little kids waddling behind them. The kind Prabhu asked if we had honored *prasadam*, and we shook our heads no. They happily pointed us to the designated *Maha* tent, which was then buzzing with activity. My parents thanked them and said a few more words as they sent my sister and me off with some *lakshmi*. I picked a little frosted cupcake that looked amazing and my sister grabbed a strawberry one, before choosing some rice and *paneer subji*. I glanced up at the Mathaji serving us as I handed her the crisp Jackson and realized that I had met her up at New Vrindaban during the annual Festival of Inspiration. I mentioned that, and recognition dawned on her face as she warmly greeted my sister and me. We smiled as she told us a little about the upcoming programs and then thanked her as we wandered back to our parents with our yummy new treasures. We found that my dad had found someone else to revel over, his Spiritual Master; His Holiness Indradyumna Maharaja. He was almost the whole purpose of our trip, aside from the installation of Their Lordships Krishna Balarama; and He was sitting not one hundred feet away, talking to a few devotees. We offered our obeisances from a distance, happy to have spotted him. Then by the Lord's mercy, we saw Govindacaran Prabhu and Rasika Siromani Mathaji, two of our dearest friends from Washington, who were also my father's godbrother and godsister. They were in charge of Maharaja's USA tour. We embraced them and remembered affectionate times spent together a few years ago before our conversation dawned on Maharaja.

"That's His sister, and those are some of His godbrothers He's talking to." They informed us, motioning to the senior devotees seated around him.

"Wow," my dad said. "That's amazing." Then he paused, looking thoughtful. "So, I'm guessing this would be a bad time to talk to him? He almost looked a little disappointed.

"Well, He really wanted to talk to His godbrothers since He hasn't seen them in a while, but I'm sure you can get His mercy and association later." Rasika Mathaji reassured him.

"Yes, yes", Govindacaran Prabhu consoled. "He will surely see you afterwards."

We agreed to meet back with them later and headed to the main temple building when a large crowd danced by and swept us with its strong current. Everyone was gathering in front of a small house, chanting loudly to the kirtan with necks craned and cameras poised and ready. We figured out what was going on by the enthusiasm painted on the devotees' faces and started chanting and dancing to the Lord's Holy Names along with the others, eager as we waited. Quite soon after, the doors swung open majestically, and a gorgeous marble Lord Balarama strode out, riding on the shoulders of some strong, pious devotees. Cameras flashes all around and I was thrust forward with the powerful push of the crowd, losing sight of my sister. Panic seized me for a mere, quick second, but then as my eyes rested on the magnificent deity form of Lord Balarama, a calm, safe feeling wrapped around me and I relaxed completely. I gazed at his beautiful strong form, his strong broad shoulders, and his arm curving out gracefully to eternally rest on Lord Krishna's shoulder. I snapped out of my gaze as someone shoved me forward and I almost slammed into the gentle Mathaji in front of me. Rocking back on my heels from the momentum, I agilely started videotaping the whole scene on my camera just as the second angelic marble figure appeared through the cramped doorway and ecstatic people rushed forward to see the transcendental form. I skipped up to the front and tried to catch a glimpse of the beautiful body before being swallowed up by the blissful devotees again. But I was unqualified to do so, because that was the last I saw of Their Lordships before they were out of sight. Shortly afterwards, the deities were carried off to the main tent and I was reunited with my mom, and we both found my dad and sister. (continued on page 3)

All together, we made our way to the colorful canopy tent pitched in the middle of the grounds, claiming seats on the wooden benches out back. We sat in the cool shade of the ancient trees and humbly watched the festivities. There were several ceremonies to be held and the pujaris were reciting the proper Sanskrit mantras before they began. Just then, a breathless Rasika Mataji bustled over, bursting with the inviting news that we could now talk to Indradyumna Maharaja. My father raced ahead and we stumbled behind, eager to receive some nectar. We offered our dandavats as he smiled down on us and blessed us. He greeted me kindly, like a grandfather, and asked about school and friends. We had a blissful, lengthy conversation, but then let some other patient devotees have their turn. My family headed to the empty entertainment tent, where they were setting up for a young kirtan group. My parents left in the middle because of an urgent phone call from Govindacaran Prabhu, requesting their assistance in serving their Guru Maharaja. Of course they happily obliged, and raced off to see what they could do. The sweet, slow kirtan ended, and the stage technicians were testing all of their mikes for Gaura Vani Prabhu and Kindred Spirits, as well as the Mayapuris, the big finale on the show for that day. Suddenly, faster than you could ever imagine, the tent filled up with countless, innumerable devotees. They just kept coming and coming, and the tent was completely packed, literally overflowing with ready listeners. Of course, Indradyumna Maharaja came too, accompanied by his godbrother His Holiness Lokanatha Swami and the whole procession was followed by a horde of orange umbrellas, as well as my mom and dad. By this time, a giant, wind-ripping storm had erupted, and it violently tore through the air, spraying freezing rain and dew onto New Raman Reti. Both Swamis were rushed under the shelter and ushered to two placed-there-three-seconds-earlier cold, plastic chairs and were seated near the very front. I was sitting in the third row or so, but I immediately jumped up and sat on the damp ground a few feet away from Maharaja's chair. The program began after many technical difficulties but was so worth it when it finally started. It was absolutely blissful, with the twining melodious vocals of Gaura Vani Prabhu and Acyuta Gopi Dasi, accompanied by the beautiful sounds of Jahnvi Harrison's lovely violin, and Kish's wonderful flute. It was amazing, and brought many devotees to tears as everyone sang along, pumping their heart and soul into the Holy Names. Then... the power went out. But to no avail, because everyone kept right on singing, with no microphone, light, or sound system. It was transcendental. As soon as the power came back on, a tumultuous, "Haribol!" shattered through the thunder and lightning. Then the power went out again, and the same reaction ensued. This scene repeated itself quite a few times, and actually got humorous at one point. Nothing could dispel the wonderful, pleasing attitude of the devotees, not even the pounding rain and freezing, bitter winds, because we were completely immersed in the transcendental singing. The amazing kirtan ended with a stunning instrumental solo mainly consisting of an improvising dance between the lovely violin and sweet flute. It was a once in a lifetime experience. Then Gaura Vani Prabhu humbly invited Lokanatha Swami and Indradyumna Swami up onto the stage, requesting Them to lead. I glanced up at Them with an encouraging smile, knowing They would accept the offer eventually. They playfully argued amongst themselves for a bit, each egging on the other to go onstage. Of course, They both got up and went up onto the stage a moment or two later, with the helpful boost of a lucky devotee. His Holiness Lokanatha Swami started a singing a slow, melodious tune and devotees got up and started swaying in rhythm. Then Radhanatha Swami joined them onstage, resulting in an excessively loud, "Haribol!" The Maharajas led an angelic kirtan; Lokanatha Swami's sweet (devotees were tearing up), Indradyumna Swami's ecstatic (got everyone up and dancing), and Radhanatha Swami's lulling (a beautiful ending). Everyone seemed to reluctantly float out of the tent as the rain slowly died down to a soft whispering patter. Devotees lined up for delicious dinner prasadam with the swirling notes of the Guru Pranam swimming in their heads. After sitting down to eat 4 scrumptious plates of tasty *palak paneer*; hot rice; zesty eggplant *subji*; and yummy cake, my family and I headed off into the darkness in search of Indradyumna Maharaja. He was seated under the canopied area at a round, white, plastic table, surrounded by well-wishing godbrothers and godsisters. In front of Him sat a cold, almost untouched, overflowing plate of prasadam, which Rasika Mathaji then picked up with a stern, scolding motherly look thrown in Maharaja's direction. He pouted sheepishly and displayed a wide-toothed grin at her disapproving sigh in response. She rushed over to us and mumbled, "Here you go." gently thrusting the plate at my father. "It's His *maha*. Help yourselves." She took a few grains of rice for herself and then she turned her face away, concerned, and mumbled to herself, "He never eats anything! And it's already so late at night." Her face fell in distress. We consoled her as we took pleasure in her motherly anxiety for her Guru. This is the ultimate relationship. We offered our obeisances and left for our car, and I sank into the plush, velvety seats, immediately falling asleep. Then next day was just like the first, which we got to start with another engaging conversation with His Holiness Indradyumna Maharaja. But this time, Maharaja did something that made it even more special. He showered His special mercy on my sister by giving her the name Rasika Rani. She was so happy, and was so grateful for this special mercy. After thanking him, we went off to the main tent, and settled back on the soft, worn wooden benches to watch the days festivities. We sat there ready to absorb the nectar of the upcoming *pujas* and ceremonies, sunscreen slathered and cameras out and charged. The agenda called for several *abhisheks* and ceremonies, one in which the cloth covering the Deities eyes was removed, and another where a holy cow was brought before Their Lordships. Watching Srila Prabhupada carried on the strong shoulders of his devotees; brought directly in front of the Lord to view Their Lordships brought many devotees around me to tears. It was transcendental. Then the auspicious unmarried ladies were brought forward; which brought laughter. The auspicious, unmarried ladies were the youngest female residents of New Raman Reti, little toddlers tied up in colorful and bright saris adorned with sparkling with gold ornaments. They smiled sweetly at their mothers as they climbed onstage and offered *dandavats* at Their Lordships' Lotus Feet. That was so cute. Then the *pujaris* started to get ready for devotee *abhishek* and we all left to take lunch *prasadam*. We ate standing in line because people had already started to line up, and the queue was getting pretty long. We saw Maharaja mercifully signing books and giving *darshan*, standing under the blistering hot sun, and my sister immediately thought of the juicy watermelon we had seen in the *Maha* tent on the way here. She excitedly asked Rasika Mathaji if there was even a thought he would accept, and she responded with an encouraging smile. "You never know," she hinted. "Go ahead and ask him." (continued on page 4)

We both ran to the *Maha* tent and immediately cut to the front of the line, giving it no second thought at all. Unknowingly serving Maharaja seemed to give us courage and we immediately grabbed 3 watermelon slices; one for Maharaja, one for us, and the other for Govindacaran Prabhu, and jogged up to pay. My sister and I thanked the startled Prabhu and hurried back to where Maharaja was now seated. He smiled at us as we humbly offered him the watermelon with our heads bowed. “Would you like some, Maharaja?” I timidly asked. I did not know if he really wanted it at the time but he kindly accepted with a grandfatherly grin. His wise eyes lit up and he said, “Oh wow! You have brought watermelon for me. Thank you very much!” I looked at my sister in appreciation. Maharaja readily sunk his teeth into the *prasadam* and juice dribbled down his face. I immediately ran back to the tent, ripping a paper towel from the lone, quickly dying roll on the table. I raced back and handed it to Indradyumna Maharaja with a satisfied smile, and he handed me his camera bag, which I was very careful with. I stood next to my sister and watched with wonder as Maharaja transformed into that little California boy who swam everyday and hung out at the Palo Alto beach with his buddies, as he ate his thirst quenching watermelon slice. It was so pure and wonderful. Then, after a few minutes of watching this, my sister and I dug into our delicious slice with red watermelon juice rolling down our chins. It was incredible! After Maharaja finished his watermelon, he thanked us and politely refused our offers for more, as he made his way up the stage to take pictures forever more on his amazing camera. My family, after waiting a good 2 hours in the same spot, finally made it onto the stage for the long-awaited personal *abhishek*. As we handed the *brahmachari* our conch, my dad leaned down and whispered, “Sincerely and humbly pray for Their mercy, because this is a once in a lifetime chance!” He turned to me, his face flushed with excitement and reverence. “You will never ever get another opportunity like this! Imagine, you are bathing Their Lordships Krsna-Balarama, and you will never get the chance again unless you become an Alachua *pujari* with second initiation.” He rolled his eyes at the thought of that. Then our conch was handed back to us and in turn we bathed Their Glorious Lordships with heart and soul. They were so beautiful. They stood with great grace, and Their lotus-petal shaped eyes swam out to me, startling with Their beauty. Then, just as quickly we were swept offstage, away from Their Divine Personalities. Having nothing else to do, we wandered, splitting into two groups. My mom and dad treaded to the main temple as me and my sister headed yet again to the entertainment tent, shimmering with dazzling colors under the starched sun. A slow-moving, peaceful, but very enchanting kirtan was being led, and I was almost lulled to a light doze. But the dance numbers started just as the tent started to fill up, and the show lights turned on as dusk fell on the dry landscape. Everyone gathered into the tent; all the devotees from all over the grounds, and you could taste the electric tingle of anticipation in the stuffy air. Just like the day before, the rain started as a weak, steady thrumming, slowly working its way into a pounding, raging storm. We found our parents and waved them over through the thick, dense crowd. My sister and I had saved them two seats, but seeing a senior Mathaji struggling to stand, we gave up one of the chairs without hesitation. That was alright, but what we do now? I squished into a chair with my sister and barely managed a squeak when she asked if I could breathe. I made myself as comfortable as the situation allowed, and readied my mind for the finale performance. I was really looking forward to the Bhakti Kalalayam dance number, just like all the other devotees gathered, and I didn’t want my mind to wander at all during the performance. And it didn’t. Well...almost.

The dance itself was amazing, a wonderful piece of fragile art all put together by Her Grace Anapayini Dasi, which of course would not have been possible without the hard, backbreaking work of the beautiful dancers determined to serve Their dear Lordships. It was just so beautiful and graceful, no words can describe it. The power even went out a couple times, but the girls just stood there palms folded respectfully, waiting for their music and lights to come back on. And when it did, they started right up again, perfectly in sync and ease. The dancers heartfelt expressions and gestures pull you into the performance and you forget that you’re sitting in a cold plastic chair half-squished to death with rain tormenting around you. That’s exactly what happened to me, but I still got distracted. I felt something scratching at my back, and I was a little itchy, but I kind of ignored it. Then I reached behind me to swat away some annoying wisp of fabric when my fingers squeeze something and I hear this sickening crunch. I nearly jump out of my skin (I jumped out of my chair), and screamed my head off. I bounced over to my mom, and I shrilly yelled, “BUG!! In the back of my dress! Cockroach!!” I was freaking out. She reached into the back folds of my sari underneath my blouse and what do you know, she pulls out this big, black, cockroach the size of my palm. Needless to say, I was SO jittery for the rest of the evening that I sat up all limbs together in my chair (my sister moved to another free seat she found) in fear of something crawling up me. I was so freaked out.

After the entertainment, everyone hurried to the main temple for the first *Gaura-Arati* after Their Lordships were installed. It was ecstatic. I completely forgot about my very close encounter with something with more legs than me as people around me raised their hands high and danced in abandon to the sweet, angelic nectar of the Lord’s Holy Names. We left the *arati* early and scarfed down some hot, delectable *prasadam* as we rushed behind Govindacaran Prabhu and Rasika Mathaji, who were rushing Maharaja home because of his ridiculously early flight the next morning. We had a last sweet parting chat with Him where He invited us to write to Him frequently, promising some quick replies. We gratefully accepted the mercy and offered *dandavats* at the dust of His Lotus Feet as he sped away in the van, after a few heartbreaking waves of goodbye. The final parting was hardest, saying goodbye to our dear friends Rasika Mathaji and Govindacaran Prabhu, promising to meet again and plan some trips together. We said goodbye to the whole Alachua community and drove away with the wind whipping through our hair, leaving with many realizations, memories, and hopefully no hard-shelled insects! It was once in a lifetime experience. Their Lordships Krsna-Balarama ki Jaya!

