



# PRINCETON BHAKTI VEDANTA INSTITUTE

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### The Singular 'I' and the Universal 'I'

How is it possible to be happy in this world despite so many difficulties in life? Sri Krishna in the *Bhagavad Gita* advises us,

*ye yatha mam prapadyante  
tams tathaiva bhajamy aham  
mama vartmanuvartante  
manusyah partha sarvasah*

“Howsoever people surrender to Me, I accordingly reward them. Being the ultimate goal of all paths, I am the objective to be attained by all. O Pārtha, all men follow My various paths.” *Bhagavad Gita - The Hidden Treasure of the Sweet Absolute*, 4.11.

“‘*ye yatha mam prapadyante*’ – As you surrender to Me, I reward you.’ It means also if you want to be cheated, He can cheat you. So our duty, our business is to be very sincere. Don’t try to play games with the Lord. If you are very sincere about surrendering to Krishna, that is the only requirement for obtaining spiritual satisfaction even in times of difficulty. If we have some other objective then we may get that as

well as the reaction,” Sripad Bhakti Madhava Puri Maharaja, Ph.D (Sripad Puri Maharaja) said as he began speaking to the assembled devotees.



**Sripad Puri Maharaj, Rasaraja Prabhu and Shobhaji**

“But sometimes we have to tell some lies for survival,” Shobha Mandava ji said. “That is not the problem. Everyone is surviving by some means or other but a surrendered soul never forgets Krishna. They always remember they have to act to fulfill His purposes and not for other reasons. Sometimes we find difficulties coming but those difficulties are not really difficulties. They are difficult, no doubt, but we may also see Krishna’s hand in that. We may not know why troubles are coming, but He has His plan and we must just try to accept His plan,” Sripad Puri Maharaja

responded. “We all are going to die. Devotees are not worried about that. They accept it as part of life. It’s the Lords’ plan. Something wonderful is there, even in death because we know life is not my story, it’s not about me, it’s His story. It is all ‘History.’ I am not the important player there. I am only part of that history or His story. Whatever He wants, even when He wants me to die, then that is also part of the story line. Death is just the period at the end of my sentence, my imprisonment in this world, then the next sentence begins in His never ending story, for His satisfaction not for mine. For devotees who can think like that - nothing can hurt them. If Krishna’s happy then we are happy. If we cling to something, it’s called attachment, and that attachment leads to entanglement, and that entanglement leads to misery and all kinds of problems. So if we live in the proper consciousness, Krishna consciousness, where it is all for Him, then He’s the enjoyer, the controller, the proprietor, and everything is in His hands for His purposes, His pleasure and I am just meant to happily serve and love Him.”

At this point some guests, Madhu, Jean and Joan joined us. Sripad Puri Maharaja informed his guests that we were discussing ‘how to be happy in spite of so many obstacles that comes to interrupt our happiness and why do we have so many obstacles. “Everyone wants to be happy but somehow there’s always something that’s putting an obstacles in the way, every once in awhile,” Sripad Puri Maharaja said then asked, what is the root cause of obstacles/evil? He went on to explain that in the world there’s “no evil or obstacles except when we put ourselves in the center and think that the world must go on according to ‘my plans and desires,’ then we find

some difficulty. But if we recognize that we are not the center, that we are just part of world ‘history’ where History means His story, then events take on a different meaning for us. We don’t say my story, we say His story,” Sripad Puri Maharaja said and asked, “Who is that ‘His’?” That is God. We call God by His divine name, Krishna.”

Sripad Puri Maharaja asked his guests if they knew anything about Vedanta or yoga. Joan responded that she had done Hatya yoga in the past but had not read any of the Vedic literatures. “Vedanta means the conclusion of knowledge found in the Vedic scriptures of India. Sri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu and Lord Nityananda, are incarnations of the Lord who came to teach about Krishna consciousness in the modern world,” Sripad Puri Maharaja explained. He then asked why are there so many universities around? “To get knowledge I guess,” Joan responded. “The word *Vedanta* comes from Sanskrit. *Veda* means knowledge and *Anta* means the conclusion of knowledge. Do you know of any university teaching what is the conclusion of knowledge?” Sripad Puri Maharaja asked. In unison the audience said no. “If you want to learn about economics, science, literature, you can go to all these places of learning but what is the conclusion of learning? Is it just to go on learning and learning? Do we have this facility for learning, for knowledge just to exorcize it but for no other purpose?” Sripad Puri Maharaja asked. In response he said, “It’s like eating, you taste something, then you want to taste something else, just tasting, tasting, tasting, knowing, knowing, knowing then eventually die. An animal is also tasting and learning so many things day after day - go to sleep, get up, go out, get your meal then come back to sleep. Humans are doing that also, in a more sophisticated way but is that all we are intended to

do? What do you think?” Sripad Puri Maharaja asked his audience.

“Yes, pretty much, that’s it really. People live and die. Not much more to life. I never really thought about it,” Joan responded. “Just sleep, breath, eat, defecate and have sexual relations,” Sripad Puri Maharaja responded. “You have to have a passion for life, in other words a purpose, but what is that purpose? Maybe we just want to get a good education, a good job and want to have a nice family,” Sripad Puri Maharaja said. “The saints of ancient India have told us that there’s something higher. There’s something more than living for some temporal reasons without a higher reason. If you die with a PhD or without a PhD would it make any difference? The quality of life may be different but ultimately we wind up in the same place, the same conclusion, isn’t it?” Sripad Puri Maharaja asked. “If someone from a very rich family dies and someone whose life is a mess dies the conclusion is not the same. The conclusion is this other person lived a good life, found enjoyment in their life whereas there’s someone who did not do that but lived a miserable life, then it’s not the same. They both die but one person fulfilled his dreams, he was happy and had a good life, whereas the other person, it’s a shame that he did not reach the potential of his life or anywhere close to it, so it’s definitely not the same conclusion of life,” Jean responded.

Sripad Puri Maharaja then gave the example of Alexander the great. “He was a student of Aristotle, the great philosopher of the West. Alexander the great went all over the world of his times conquering many lands and taking all the



**Bhaktin Dorothy, Rasaraja Prabhu, Sripad Puri Maharaj, guests: Joan and Jean**

wealth and wisdom, everything that he could from all these places. Later when he was near death, he told his doctors ‘When I die, I want you to put me on a stretcher, not a palanquin but a simple stretcher.’ He asked all his doctors to carry that stretcher through the streets. He continued, ‘I want my hands to hang outside the stretcher with palms up. and all my ministers, ambassadors and servants to follow behind me carrying all the riches that I have obtained from all over the world, throwing those riches on the streets like so much garbage.’ All his ministers are looking at him, ‘Here you are dying and what are you saying. Have you lost your mind or something?’ and he said ‘No, there’s some reason for this.’” Sripad Puri Maharaja said smilingly. “His ministers are asking, ‘why are you telling us like that?’ Then Alexander said, ‘I want people to understand that when you die you have to leave everything behind. You’ve entered this world naked and empty handed and you have to leave in the same way. All the doctors in the world can not save you at the time of death, that’s why I want you to carry my stretcher. I want people to realize that all the preparations they are making for preserving their life mean nothing at the time of death. And all the wealth and riches you have accumulated, whether intellectual or material, are only like so much garbage in the streets. People find those things valuable but people must recognize that ultimately all the worldly things people are aspiring for mean nothing at the time of

death.’ This wisdom he learned from his teacher, Aristotle, that there are things more valuable than what people ordinarily recognize in life. There’s something more valuable that is eternal. We have a life and it is not just meant to be engaged in superficial things, even intellectual or cultural endeavors. They are also not the ultimate concern for any life especially for human life.”

“Human beings have religion but the animals don’t have religion,” Sripad Puri Maharaja said. Why does the human being have those things and animals don’t have them? In response he said, “We have reasoning. It is said that man is a rational animal. We can understand something more than just the animal propensities, We have to understand what is that higher reason that only human have, that seeks for truth and purpose in something like religion. The highest conception that Man has ever reached is the idea of God,” Sripad Puri Maharaja said then asked where did this idea come from? In response, Bhaktin Dorothy said, “The spirit.”



**Ved ji and Bhaktin Madhu ji with Joan and Jane**

“Yes, but how? When the scientist looks at this carpet, does he see a carpet? Sripad Puri Maharaja asked. Jokingly Joan said, “the floor.” “Yes, but he also thinks of it in terms of atoms, electrons and molecules. He doesn’t look at things the way we do. He wants to know what is it made of? What kind of

substance is it? He picks it up, puts it into a test tube and tries to tear it apart to find out what it is made of. He doesn’t accept just the superficial appearance of it. He wants to know what is the essence, the underlying substance of it. What we may not ordinarily think about such things a scientist tries to understand that behind everything there’s something else. It’s called essence. What the thing is and what the essence of the thing is, form two layers, one over the other, and this is why we call it ‘under – standing” Sripad Puri Maharaja said.

“What am I? The ‘I’ is the uniting principle behind everything in this world. Everything is seen as a whole, fits into a pattern because ‘I’ am there. Sripad Puri Maharaja continued. “I unite all my experiences as my identity. If I were to just experience things, one after another, I am hot, now I am cold, I am this now I am that, there would not be any meaningful identity of my own existence. But I put them together as my common existential identity. Thus I called it ‘my life’ where I have a consciousness, an awareness that comes from all those experiences. That awareness is my consciousness and when that consciousness becomes conscious of itself, then it is called ‘I.’ Everyone calls themselves ‘I.’ When you say ‘I’ you are referring to yourself but then everyone says ‘I.’ What does that tell us? Is ‘I’ refer to a singular subject something universal? Sripad Puri Maharaja asked. “‘I’ is referring to yourself, I guess,” Joan responded. “We mean only our singular self when we say “I’, but what we actually utter is really something that is a universal,” Sripad Puri Maharaja responded.

“When something is the essence of so many different things we call it a universal. When we say ‘I’ although, we mean our self, everyone says it. It’s distributed

everywhere, so it's universal. 'I' is universal so that means there's more than just the singular 'I.' There's also a universal 'I,'" Sripad Puri Maharaja continued. "Plato had the idea that everything that exists, is a participant in a higher idea. There's always this structural hierarchy so human reason does not only have to stick to the particulars of situations that they encounter. There are deeper and deeper things that man can realize by his intelligence, his reason and ultimately come to understand that there's God also - the supreme individual, the Supreme Personality of Godhead, Sri Krishna. That is what Vedanta teaches," Sripad Puri Maharaja continued. "When you try to conclude what all this knowledge is about, dive deep into reality, then we come up with something beyond the superficial appearance of things. We come to understand what life is actually about. So don't just accept things on the surface. By meditation it is meant to go inward to find these things that are there already existing in us but we don't pay attention to them. We have not explored them."

The conclusion of *Hari katha* was followed by *harinam sankirtan*, led by Sripad Puri Maharaja.




**L-R Back: Madhuji, Rasaraja Prabhu, Dorothy, Vedji, and Sripad Puri Maharaja**



*Prasadam* was then served and honored by all.

Srila Bhakti Nirmal Acharya Maharaja ki jai  
Sripad Bhakti Madhava Puri Maharaj ki jai

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