



PRINCETON BHAKTI VEDANTA INSTITUTE

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Proper Mood of Devotion: Enjoyment vs Reverence

While driving to the Bhakti Vedanta Institute (BVI) at Princeton University, casually the conversation of the difference between enjoyment and reverence of gurudev's birth place was discussed. Rasaraja das Prabhu explained that one devotee, who had gone to Hapaniya Dham, the holy birthplace of Srila Bhakti Raksak Sridhar Dev-Goswami Maharaj^[1] (Srila Guru Maharaja) said, 'Oh Maharaj I enjoyed so much the place where you were born.' After hearing the comment, Srila Guru Maharaj said, 'Actually you should not enjoy the place where the guru was born. You should revere the Guru's birth place. It is a sacred Dham (holy place).'"

After receiving that nectar, Kushum devi dasi asked if the word "enjoyed" could be replaced with another word in a spiritual sense? "I do not know. You would need someone like Sripad Puri Maharaja to answer," Rasaraja das Prabhu responded.

After a wonderful outdoor Harinam Sankirtan at Princeton's Palmer Square Park, we went back to the BVI's office for our weekly *sanga* with Sripad Bhakti Madhava Puri Maharaj, Ph.D (Sripad Puri Maharaja). As we began,, Rasaraja das Prabhu posed the same question regarding our car conversation to Sripad Puri

Maharaja. "We were discussing that sometimes we still have this spirit of enjoyment even in spiritual life. That spirit of enjoyment should be put aside. We should more revere and respect whatever is good for our spiritual life." Kushum devi dasi added that we were talking about honoring *prasadam* (sacred remnants of the Lord) versus enjoying *prasadam*. Can the word "enjoy" in a spiritual sense be replaced with another word?"



Rasaraja das Prabhu with Sripad Puri Maharaja

"Once a devotee was fanning the Lord and he was feeling some ecstasy but that ecstasy was preventing him from fanning properly. So he was praying, 'Please don't let this interrupt my service. Don't let this joy, overwhelming ecstasy interrupts my service.' At that time we don't want to have enjoyment when it

interrupts our service. If it encourages our service then that's what we want but if it disturbs our service, then that we don't want," Sripad Puri Maharaja responded. "Srila Guru Maharaja mentioned that even Srimati Radharani while meditating on Krishna felt Her ecstasy and greed for Krishna's touch became disturbances to constancy of Her Divine vision. "Still service must be enjoyable otherwise we wouldn't do it. Spiritual life is enjoyable. It's *ananda* (ever blissful). That *ananda* will enthuse us in our service. Srila Rupa Goswami has given us two principles: accept everything favorable and reject everything unfavorable to devotional service. Devotees may feel very happy or unhappy in their service, but that is not the important thing. When both joy and sadness don't impede your service then you're already on the transcendental platform."

"The central point is serving the Lord, not whether we are enjoying it or not. We are very interested in serving with love and devotion in self-forgetfulness. In any loving relationship there may be so many unhappy situations and happy situations also but the attitude of being a friend, a father, a mother, a husband or a wife doesn't change. We know we are there to serve, to carry out our responsibilities. It is like that in spiritual life also, our firm commitment is there, despite enjoyment or non-enjoyment," Sripad Puri Maharaja continued. "Nothing is wrong in enjoying *prasadam*. It should be relished. That kind of enjoyment will increase our service attitude. Hanking for *prasadam* is hanking for Krishna. To want to taste *prasadam* is wanting to taste Krishna in a serving relationship but we should not want to taste *bhoga* before it is offered. Everything that is connected with service, we want to relish it. That enhances the devotee's service. So in spiritual life I think we can replace 'enjoy' with 'relish'."

Going back into his memory archive, Sripad Puri Maharaja said, "I loved visiting Sri Hapaniya, the birth place of Srila Guru Maharaja. When I was there, it was like being in a completely different world. It was like

going to a different planet and because of that beautiful feeling I had when I went, I always remember it. Could that be bad?" Sripad Puri Maharaja asked. "It's not like a mundane pleasure. I may not have liked it if it wasn't connected with Srila Guru Maharaja appearance. It was a very plain place but knowing it was connected with Srila Guru Maharaja made it very special. From whatever taste I had from that experience I could always remember that place. It was very simple and sublime like Srila Guru Maharaja himself was. His nature was like that place from which he came." Sripad Puri Maharaja went on to quote Srila Rupa Goswami, who said, 'Whatever is conducive for service we accept and whatever is not conducive we reject.' That would be my understanding."

"Guru Maharaja said to that devotee, 'you should not enjoy the guru's place of birth, you should be more reverential,'" Rasaraja das Prabhu said.

"The first thing is to follow the guidance of Guru. Gurudeva advises according to the mentality of his disciple. So if they are of a certain nature, only going to different places for eye exercise, and not with a service mood on behalf of guru, that's not good," Sripad Puri Maharaja continued. "Whoever makes pilgrimage by order of guru to go to holy places, his devotional service mood will be nourished by hearing from the devotees there. Certainly to enjoy that is OK. One should not go to the holy places just to relieve their sins, but to hear from the devotees who visit or live there, to get their instructions, to render some service -- that's the real purpose of going. So by traveling to the holy places to get some inspiration, continuing on in your service -- that is what one wants from visiting the holy places. Srila Prabhupada^[3] used to invite everyone to come to Mayapur every year, because he knew it was important for them to have that joy of associating with the devotees and then going back to wherever they were coming from and take that heart's treasure they had received back with them. We all felt surcharged when we would come back from the devotional association of Srila Prabhupada and the devotees at the holy places. And the same as at the Sri Chaitanya Saraswat Math *parikramas*."

"Being that we are so attached to materialism today, which is more important for us, visiting Vrindavan or Mayapur, for our *sadhana* (spiritual growth)?" Kushum devi dasi asked. "Mayapur, because we are approaching Radha Krishna through Mahaprabhu.^[4] . We don't approach Krishna directly. We want the mercy of Lord Nityananda (Guru) and through Him the mercy of Lord Chaitanya (transcendental consciousness of *vipralamba bhava*), and from there the service of the servants of Srimati Radharani and Krishna in Vrindavan," Sripad Puri Maharaja responded. "We don't approach directly. We approach in the humble mood of *vipralamba bhava* (mood of separation) 'that I am not worthy' as Mahaprabhu taught. There is higher ecstasy in that mood than in direct approach. Like you said, we are taking our mundane attachments there. We first have to purify our serving mood to approach transcendental ecstasy, that is proper enjoyment."

"Krishna das Babaji, a disciple of Srila Saraswati Thakur, was often visiting Srila Guru Maharaja after Srila Saraswati Thakur's disappearance, and sometimes he would go to Hapaniya. Srila Guru Maharaja asked him, 'why are you going to Hapaniya?' He replied, 'Because of the high poetry you have composed, I consider you to be Srila Rupa Goswami, therefore your birth place is a holy place of pilgrimage,'" Sripad Puri Maharaja continued. "He certainly had some taste. He used to chant all the time. If anyone would ask him any questions or to give a lecture, all he would say is 'Hare Krishna.' He would only chant. Srila Guru Maharaja said 'he has some realization, some knowledge.' If we have such realization, that actual knowledge then everything becomes positive. Whatever we experience becomes a positive incentive. Srila Guru Maharaja explained that for those in Krishna consciousness the whole environment becomes our friend, affectionately encouraging us in our service. Nothing will take us away from our eternal service life but everything will come affectionately to help us."

"So in that sense Mayadevi is working with us, not against us?" Kushum devi dasi inquired further. "It is not her jurisdiction. Her jurisdiction takes us away from Krishna. In spiritual life we are under the jurisdiction of Yogamaya not Mahamaya. Yogamaya has one function and Mahamaya has another. Mahamaya leads us into entanglement while Yogamaya guides us in our devotion, absorption, and attachment to Krishna," Sripad Puri Maharaja responded. "We are no longer in the jurisdiction of Mahamaya when we become surrendered souls. Mahamaya is like the prison guard. She's also a devotee so in that sense she may help. But generally we consider devotion to be under the jurisdiction of Yogamaya."

At this point a guest, Zhanna, arrived. Sripad Puri Maharaja briefly reiterated the topics we were earlier discussing then continued. "We practice what is called *bhakti yoga*. Bhakti is devotion so *bhakti yoga* is yoga of the heart, devotional yoga. It may sound strange that people can practice yoga of devotion, a discipline of learning how to engage in a life of service with affection. Everyone is serving someone in this world but *bhakti yoga*, devotional service teaches us how to serve with affection, with love, not only one another but how to serve God. Just as in the Bible it says 'Love God above all. Love thy neighbors as thyself,'" Sripad Puri Maharaja explained. "There are two types of love. One is for this worldly plane and the other is for the transcendental plane that is higher in the sense of dedication rather than exploitation. So *bhakti yoga* is for that higher plane. How to make a connection to that plane in a serving, dedicated and devotional mood."

Pointing to the pictures on the altar he continued, "We have these pictures of our *guru varga* (family of spiritual teachers) here and pictures of Lord Nityananda and Sri Gauranga who are *avatars* (incarnations) of the Lord. They appeared about five hundred years ago in India and they were teaching the way of developing devotion to Divinity through meditation on the Hare Krishna Maha Mantra (great mantra) - *Hare Krishna Hare Krishna Krishna Krishna Hare Hare Hare Rama Hare Rama Rama Rama Hare Hare*. This mantra is what we chant. They taught

that simply by chanting this mantra in a congregational group of devotees it is very easy to make spiritual progress because today it seems people are not so much interested in going to Churches or temples, or doing all the rituals that were traditionally done where religion is concerned. A lot of people are not doing that anymore. They go to big rock concerts or football games, or whatever and that is how they congregate today,” Sripad Puri Maharaja continued. “A simple way of getting people together to worship God is through this chanting of the names of God and anyone can do that, in any place at any time, there is no restriction and it’s very joyful. So we practice this process called *sankirtan* (congregational chanting),” Sripad Puri Maharaja said. “Mahaprabhu has told that ‘anyone who can do that can get some spiritual benefit in this life and make progress toward the higher devotional plane. We practice that. We have literature on all these things and this whole process is called *bhakti yoga*. It’s a wholesome scientific system. That’s what we teach and practice ourselves,” Sripad Puri Maharaja said and then continued. “In India they have a broad tradition of spiritual knowledge and literature called the Vedas. It’s like the Bible in the Christian world but much more elaborate and expansive than the scriptures of the Western tradition and there the system of *yoga* and *bhakti* are also taught.”

“What is yoga? What is the difference between spiritual and physical yoga?” Zhanna asked. “Yoga means yoke, which means to connect, so yoga means to link with the higher plane and that connection can be made through the heart with love. Now the yoga of the body was not particularly meant for the body but it is a means to eliminate the distracting influence of the body when one wants to become absorbed in meditating on the higher plane of spiritual reality,” Sripad Puri Maharaja explained. “The body actually becomes a distraction for the yogis who want to go beyond materiality to the spiritual plane. There are different *chakras* (vital points) in the body and each of these *chakras* can lead to different levels of

entanglement of the body with the world, so the yogic process is not just to make the body supple but to bring the life of the body up through the different *chakras* and in that way elevate one’s self consciousness to the transcendental platform of understanding the Divine Supersoul, or the presence of God within the heart.. We practice that same process through *bhakti yoga*, the yoga of devotion. This does not require yoga poses and it’s much easier than trying to understand through the mind or philosophically or other disciplines. People, of course, today are very materially oriented, so they take yoga and turn it into an exercise for the body. That’s OK, it definitely does good to the body but they don’t realize the original purpose behind it or where it comes from.”

“In India there are six schools of knowledge for achieving that higher transcendental vision and yoga is one of them. We follow the school of Vedanta (the end, the conclusion of knowledge) in the *bhakti* tradition,” Sripad Puri Maharaja said. “Why is it the end of knowledge?” guest, Zhanna asked. “In other words, people are all trying to acquire knowledge of different types but why do we have this desire to acquire knowledge? What is the end or the purpose for acquiring all that knowledge? What is the goal of knowledge? What is our knowing trying to know?” Sripad Puri Maharaja asked in his response.



Sripad Puri Maharaja, Rasaraja das Prabhu and guest Sobha Mandava

“For me personally, I don’t see the end, it’s a continuous course. If I learn something it gives me mental pleasure and I feel more powerful, not that I will exert that power on someone. It’s just that within, I feel more powerful.” Zhanna commented. “Everything is like that in this world, whether it’s eating, sex, power, money, education = it’s

never enough,” Sripad Puri Maharaja explained. “And they are unhappy” Zhanna replied sarcastically. “That’s the point. People want to have knowledge and there’s never enough. There’s no end to their want and that’s a form of unhappiness. But knowledge is not about having as much as you can, knowledge has a purpose. Why do we have this capacity to know? What is the purpose of knowing? What is that knowing capacity for? Is there some goal, some purpose for this knowing capacity that we have?” Sripad Puri Maharaja asked and responded “That’s what Vedanta tries to teach. There is something that you are trying to know and that is the Infinite, God. Without knowing the true Infinite, we engage in the endless or infinite pursuit of knowledge. If you use your ability to know but you don’t know that highest truth then you have wasted your valuable human life. You are just misusing the power that has been given to you to know what you were supposed to know: Your relationship with God. This is the greatest knowledge, the highest achievement but people don’t realize it and they are being misdirected into pursuing so many different types of knowledge. They are forgetting the real purpose or conclusion of knowledge, given in the Vedanta. That’s what we try to learn and practice in our lives and thereby achieve the perfect fulfillment of life.”

We ended the discussion with *Harinama Sankirtana* (congregational chanting of the Holy Names) led by Sripad Puri Maharaja.



**Rasaraja das Prabhu, Sripad Puri Maharaja
with guests: Zhanna and Sai**

Then a *prasadam* feast was served and honored by all.

All Glories to Sri Guru and Sri Sri Gauranga
Srila Bhakti Nirmal Acharya Maharaja ki jai
Sripad Bhakti Madhava Puri Maharaj ki jai

<p>Your humble servant, Kushum Devi Dasi (New York)</p>		<p>Service Donations https://ipn.intuit.com/pay/BhaktivedantaInstitute</p>
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Footnotes

- [1] Srila Bhakti Raksak Sridhar Dev-Goswami Maharaj - Founder-President-Acharyya: Sri Chaitanya Saraswat Math
- [2] His Divine Grace A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Srila Prabhupada (Srila Prabhupada) is the founder Acharya of the International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON)
- [3] Sri Krishna Chaitanya Mahaprabhu appeared in in Mayapur, West Bengal, India in 1486. Although He is the Supreme Lord Himself, Sri Krishna, He posed as a devotee, and revealed the most sublime sentiments and the natural disposition of a devotee. He taught us by His own example how to establish a connection with the Lord through the practice of pure devotion. Srila Rupa Goswami has glorified Lord Chaitanya as being the most munificent Lord because He freely distributed pure love of Godhead.

