



PRINCETON BHAKTI VEDANTA INSTITUTE

REPORT - APRIL 7, 2018

Bhakti Vedanta Institute
of Spiritual Culture and Science
20 Nassau St., Ste. 116
Princeton, NJ 08542
Phone 732-604-4135
Website: bviscs.org

Sri Abhiram Thakur's Disappearance. Sri Guru and His Grace

Celebrating the memory of Sri Abhiram Thakur on his disappearance day, who is also known as Sridama in Vrindavan during Sri Krishna's pastimes, our weekly *sadhu sanga* at our Princeton Bhakti Vedanta Institute (BVI) center began with Harinam Sankirtan. Rasaraja das Prabhu on *mrdangam*, accompanied by Sripad Bhakti Madhava Puri Maharaja, Ph.D (Sripad Puri Maharaja), Bhakta Mike and Sadbhuj Prabhu on kartals and joined by Zhanna, Jayadev Prabhu and myself.



Mike, Prabhus Sadabhuj, Rasaraja, Sripad Puri Maharaja, Zhanna, Jaydev Prabhu

Sripad Puri Maharaja asked Jayadev das Prabhu to read from the special notes he had prepared on the disappearance of Sri Abhiram Thakura. "In his pastimes in Vrindavan during Krishna's *lila* (pastimes), Sri Abhiram Thakur is Sridam, one of the twelve prominent cowherd boys, but in Chaitanya Mahaprabhu's *lila* he appeared as Abhiram das Thakur. He is very esoteric, with a very eccentric personality," Jayadev Prabhu said before reading from his prepared notes taken from the book "Sri Chaitanya: His life & Associates" by Swami Bhakti Balabha Tirtha Maharaja. [1] Please see the link below for the full article. At this point, Jayadev Prabhu (a wonderful vaisnava artist) handed out to the assembled devotees a copy of his drawing of Sri Abhiram das Thakur in honor of this day.

There are many amazing things about Sri Abhiram das Thakur's pastimes. Once in Vrindavan, it is said that Krishna and the cowherd boys were playing

hide and seek. Suddenly Krishna wanted to go to Nabadwip in the middle of their game so all the cowherd boys went to Nabadwip with Krishna but Sridam was hiding and he didn't know that they had left. When they got to Nabadwip, Krishna became Chaitanya Mahaprabhu. There He began missing Sridam and feeling deep separation from him. He's looking around 'where is Sridam' and nobody could understand where Sridam went until they realized that he was still hiding," Sripad Puri Maharaja said. "I believe it was Nityananda Prabhu that went to Vrindavan to look for Sridam. He was calling 'Sridam, Sridam where are you?' Sridam was very tall because he was still in the *Dwarpa yuga* and the people in that *yuga* were much taller than they are in *Kali yuga* when Mahaprabhu appears. So when Nityananda Prabhu found him, he said 'Oh, Mahaprabhu is missing you so much.' Sridam then said, 'I am missing Him also.' So Nityananda Prabhu asked him to come back to Nabadwip, but he was a little reluctant to come back. He said, 'Well, if you want me to go back with you to Nabadwip then you will have to carry me on your shoulders then I will come with you.' During their hide and seek pastimes, when you couldn't find the person then that means you have lost the game and the losing team has to carry the boys who won the game on their shoulders. So Nityananda Prabhu said, 'Look, how is this going to happen?'" Sripad Puri Maharaja continued laughingly because compared to Sridam, Nityananda Prabhu is smaller in size. "Anyhow, they made some adjustments and then went back to Nabadwip. Sridam changed his body and went back as Abhiram Thakur."



Sri Abhiram Gopal Thakur (Drawing by Jayadeva Prabhu)

Speaking to Jayadeva Prabhu, Sripad Puri Maharaja continued, “You mentioned about that log that Sridam found and lifted for making a flute. For him it was like a normal size flute but for Nityananda and everyone else, it was like a gigantic log and that is why they were saying 16 people were required to lift that log. What they meant is 16 smaller people couldn’t carry it although for Sridam he could easily carve it into a flute.”

“When you read that he used to offer obeisances to the stones and they would break into pieces, what happened is that some people would keep different stones on the altar like the *shaligram shila* (black stone form of Narayan) with different marking but not every stone is a *shaligram shila*. A real *shaligram shila* is non-different from Narayan and if you had the proper *shila* and you are worshipping that then you will be worshipping the Lord. That is a very powerful manifestation of Narayan. Anyhow, some people would keep these *shilas* on their altar and not all of them are actual *shilas*. They don’t have these qualified marks on them so when Sridam Thakur would offer his obeisances to them, if that *shila* was not genuine, it would just crumble to smithereens. His obeisances are so powerful. His realization is so substantial that’s basically what happens.”



Bhakta Mike, Rasaraja das, Sripad Puri Maharaja, Sadabhuj, Zhanna and Jayadev das Prabhu

“It is also mentioned that Nityananda’s wife (Janhavi) had six children before Gangadevi and Virachandra. Each time they had a child, Abhiram would come and offer his obeisances to the children and each time they would die. In a similar way Devaki, who was also Krishna’s mother, had to lose six children to Kamsa before Krishna appeared. It is said that they represent *kama* (lust), *krodha* (anger), *lobh* (greed), *moha* (attachment), *mada* (pride), and *matsarya* (jealousy). These six passions must be cleared from the heart before Krishna can appear there. So it may be similar in the case of Nityananda’s children,” Sripad Puri Maharaja said then asked his audience if they know the significance of that pastime.

“Many years ago, I had asked Jayapataka Swami about that, why Nityananda Prabhu’s own children could not survive Abhiram’s obeisances and he said that ‘that’s the mysteries of the Lord’s pastimes,’ Jayadev Prabhu said.

“So Nityananda Prabhu similarly had six children and Abhiram would come and offer his obeisances and the children would die. Then when Nityananda’s daughter, Ganga Devi was born and Abhiram offered his obeisances, nothing happened to Her, so they could understand that Ganga devi was a divine personality and the same thing was true when his son Virachandra, was born. Of course, Virachandra became a very powerful preacher. He was even more extensive in his preaching than Nityananda Prabhu Himself. He preached so widely and made so many devotees. It is said that Abhiram is such a pure devotee that even the atheists and the false stones of worship would crack since they could not sustain his obeisances. He was such a humble and genuine *vaisnava* if he offered his humble obeisance to you, your heart would be transformed just by his genuine humility. He could transform everything and everyone,” Sripad Puri Maharaja continued.

“I don’t know this word. What is obeisance?” guest, Zhanna asked. “When you offer veneration, reverence to others by bowing down. This can also be done within the mind and with the body but the idea is that you offer obeisance in a heartfelt mood of surrender, humility, respect and honor. That has a transforming effect both on the person offering obeisance and the person who receives it, when it comes from a place of truth.” Sripad Puri Maharaja responded.

“Jesus is said to have expressed the idea in John 8.31, ‘If you are faithful to my teachings, you will know the truth, and that truth will set you free.’ The truth is that we are spiritual and not material beings. Knowing the truth that we are spirit in essence is to recognize that we are already free – we don’t have to endeavor for it, we just have to dissolve the coverings of temporality, ignorance and misery that accompany the material conception of life. That’s why knowing the truth of ourselves as spirit will set us free. That truth has Its own power and agency.”

“We are all part of the absolute, fundamental living essence (or truth) that is there to be known. Spirit is the real essence of life that is already present and with which we have somehow or other lost connection. We become enamored with the mind and body which are only the external appearance of the inner essence which is the real self that is related to Krishna. But we lose sight of that connection,” Sripad Puri Maharaja continued. “So when we are living, engaged in different life experiences, we have to keep focus, keep our attention on our true identity and not get diverted from it, because such diversion is what causes illusory existence to arise around a false ego, as it is called. False ego means thinking oneself to be what one is not, being absorbed in selfishly centered material activities forgetting one’s loving relationship with Krishna.”

“Abhiram Thakur knows the true substance, the true self. Of course he’s a very special soul, called *parishad* (intimate associate of Krishna, the internal potency of the Lord). Such associates are not ordinary persons like us, they are divine persons. They are portions of the the *antaranga shakti* (internal energy). We are portions of the *tatastha shakti* (marginal energy) of the Lord, between the internal (*antaranga*) and the external (*bahiranga*) energies of the Lord’s potencies. We can become influenced by either of these two energies until we become properly situated. Those who are part and parcel of the internal energy, they are not subject to the effects of *maya* or the *bahiranga shakti*. So Abhiram was a *parishad* devotee related to the Lord in the mood of *sakhyā rasa* (friendship).”

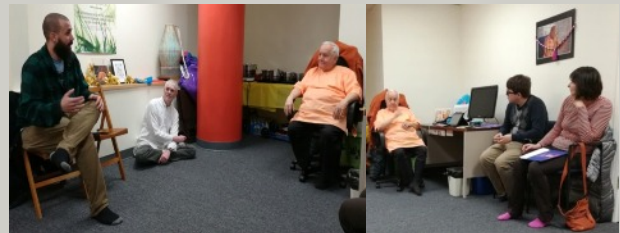
“There are five *rasas*. There is (1) *shanta* (neutrality), (2) *dāsya* (servitorship), (3) *sakhyā* (friendship) of which there are two types. One in which Krishna is superior and the other in which the devotee feels equal or superior to Krishna. It is said that two-and-a-half *rasas* are not found in Goloka Vrindavan referring to *Santa*, *dasya* and half of *sakhyā* where one feels that Krishna is superior. There are also two-and-a-half *rasas* that are part of Goloka Vrindavan which include friends who can defeat Krishna in play and Krishna is very happy to be defeated by His friends. Another *rasa* beyond that where devotees feel even more superior to Krishna is as His parents (*vātsalya rasa*). In this *rasa* mother Yasodha and father Nanda Maharaja can chastise Krishna and even be whipped by them in order that He grow up to behave properly. Christianity thinks of God as the Father but can you think yourself as the father of God? Sripad Puri Maharaja asked.

“Sometimes persons may think, ‘Why is God so cruel? Why is He whipping me?’ But the devotee thinks ‘Being whipped by Krishna is His great kindness and mercy because He has some concern for me. He is not indifferent to me.’ There’s an ecstasy that is associated with such a whipping. To be chastised by Krishna is a blessing. Not only chastisement, Krishna can do anything to show us His love – His devotee will not abandon Him even if He seems to abandon His devotee. Sri Chaitanya Mahāprabhu in the mood of separation prayed to Krishna, ‘Even if You cruelly break my heart by not revealing Your presence before me, still You will always be my worshipful Lord.’

“But the materialists, atheists, become arrogant, they feel ‘Why are you whipping me? No one is superior to me,’ Sripad Puri Maharaja laughingly said. “They don’t see the affection of the Lord coming to help correct them. Krishna feels like that when His mother whips Him. He doesn’t think ‘Oh you are such a mean mother. How can you do this to me? I am God,’ He never thinks like that. He understands the affections of a mother who is only concerned for His own benefit.’ Mothers generally have that kind of mentality

about their children and that exists between mother Yasodha and Krishna. We may also note that Abhiram Thakur had a whip called *Jaya Mangala* (auspicious victory) that would instill Krishna consciousness in anyone who received his mercy.”

“Then in (5) *mādhurya rasa*, a conjugal relation exists between Krishna and the *Gopis* (cowherd girls), especially Radharani and Krishna. This may be difficult to properly understand because we may say it’s the highest level of realization.”



Bhakta Mike, Rasaraja das, Sripad Puri Maharaj, Sadbhuj and Zhanna

“In Dwarka there’s conjugal love in married life but in Vrindavan, married life, which is based upon respecting social, moral and ethical conventions, while honored and revered is not the purest concern. The primary concern is love for Krishna – pure love unmixed with other considerations. Those who understand morality and the deeply sacred commitment of married love, can realize the unexcelled purity of the love that lies beyond that.”

“Even in that platform of highest love there is gradation, a difference between the love that feels ‘I am Krishna’s’ and ‘Krishna is mine,’” Sripad Puri Maharaja said. “Here again we find a kind of superior and inferior mood being expressed. This difference is found in the moods of Chandravali’s and Radharani’s love for Krishna in Vrindavan. The lover seems to somehow hold a superior position to Krishna in thinking Krishna is Mine.’ Although Krishna is the Supreme Godhead, He feels a distance from those who love Him with a tinge of awe, and thus is more attracted to the love of Srimati Radharani who feels “Krishna is mine.”

“Pure love, love for its own sake without mixture of any other ingredient, is divinely personified by Radha Krishna, and manifested in Krishna *prema*. The idea of virtue for its own sake finds expression in the saying “virtue is its own reward.’ These phrases try to represent the conception of purity of purpose without exterior motive. This is what is desirable,” Sripad Puri Maharaja explained.

Guest, Zhanna, said that, “I’ve been listening to some lectures and one of the questions posed by a student, not arrogantly, was, “‘Why do we need a *guru*? I can read the *Bhagavad-gītā* myself.’ The lecturer explained that ‘you can buy a book on anatomy, on how to operate on somebody, you can study it but it doesn’t make you a surgeon. You need

to go and practice it, not only by yourself but you need somebody who has the knowledge to show you and to explain it to you and only then you will become a surgeon yourself. You need to employ the knowledge and help of the people who went through all of the empiric knowledge.’ He said you can go and get a book online how to become an engineer but it would not make you an engineer. You need, again, somebody who has the knowledge and experience,”

“We might think of it as the difference between the concept and the reality, or theoretical and practical knowledge. You can have a concept of something, like the scientists who have some idea about photosynthesis – photons come from sunlight, the chlorophyll molecules in the plant absorb that energy and eventually convert it into cellulose, but with all of that theoretical knowledge they still cannot create a blade of grass. They say they have the concepts and they understand how it works but they cannot make a blade of grass even in their most sophisticated laboratories,” Sripad Puri Maharaja responded.

“The student was asking especially, ‘why do we need a teacher?’” Zhanna followed-up with.

Sripad Puri Maharaja replied, “*Guru* is not merely a teacher. The grace or affection of guru toward the disciple is the real transforming influence that we may not get from a book. The disciple also must experience trust, respect, and affection for guru. Disciple means there must be a willingness to accept discipline – humility, obedience, chastity, loyalty, long-suffering, servitude, and so on are the desirable qualifications of the proper disciple. These qualities cannot be developed simply by reading. A personal interaction with guru and devotees is necessary to create the proper environment in which these qualities can be nurtured. The spiritual world consists of inter personal conscious existence, not mundane social life, but transcendental relations that we can learn best from the authentic representative of that plane, who are endowed with unexcelled humility, understanding and love.”

“Guru Maharaja, Srila Sridhar Maharaja, once explained that there may be three types of guru, depending on their realizations: (1) One who is standing in this world but who is looking up to the transcendental world and directing others there. (2) One who has one foot here and the other there and is helping others to get to the higher conscious world. (3) One who has both feet there in the transcendental world and influences others by example,” Sripad Puri Maharaja continued.

“Just as we say that life comes from life, so we can say that bhakti comes from bhakti, it doesn’t come from *karma*, *jnana* or *yoga*, and bhakti is found in the heart of a bhakta, a devotee. So we must

approach a *bhakta* if we want to get bhakti. Srila Bhaktivinoda Thakur expressed his deep love for the vaisnava, devotee of the Lord, when he writes in his beautiful Bengali poem, *Sharanagati* (Surrender)

*krsna se tomara, krsna dite paro,
tomara sakati ache
ami to’ kangala, ‘krsna ‘krsna ‘boli’,
dhai tava pache pache*

He is saying: Krsna is yours; you have the power to give Him to me. I am simply a beggar running behind you crying, “Krsna! Krsna.”

“We cannot expect something from someone if they don’t have it. For example, we cannot learn chemistry from a person who has only elementary or no knowledge of it. In the same way we can expect to learn about Krishna only from someone acquainted with Him. Of course sincere souls never feel they know Krishna or love Krishna. A humble vaisnava devotee of the Lord, like Bhaktivinoda Thakur always feels others may have what he is lacking. Anyone can say “I love God” but it is only behaving in one’s life in accord with what one says that it can be accepted as genuine.”

“How would you normally form a relationship with your *guru*?” Sadbhuj Prabhu asked. “By surrender, obedience. Humility means obedience,” Sripad Puri Maharaja responded. “Sometimes one may instantaneously know that they have met guru and want to surrender there. Other times we may want to hear patiently and examine carefully if we feel we can make some spiritual progress with the guidance of a particular guru. In the same way guru may spontaneously think, let me give this innocent soul a chance, to show some mercy. Other times guru may also want to examine the disciple to determine their eligibility to be a proper disciple. In the Vedic tradition there is also initiation, *diksha*, a Sanskrit word that means ‘to give or impart’ {*di/da*} and ‘destroys or removes’ (*ksha*). The spiritual master imparts spiritual knowledge to the disciple that also removes the ignorance and illusion of material misconceptions.”

“The lecturer I mentioned before was also saying a relation with a guru should be obedience, respect and all of that, but not blindly because blindly then it becomes a cult or fanaticism because a teacher has the right and the ability to control you,” Zhanna said.

“Yes, there must be a real teacher and a real student. It cannot be false,” Sripad Puri Maharaja said. “If the teacher is false, then everything is false and if the student is false, then he/she cannot make any progress. The *Bhagavad-gita* 4.34 does not recommend blind following. There it describes the disciple’s qualifications: ‘*pranipatena, pariprasnena and sevaya*’

*tad viddhi pranipatena
pariprasnena sevaya*

‘You will be able to attain knowledge by satisfying the divine master with submission, relevant inquiry, and sincere service. The enlightened souls who are learned in scriptural knowledge and endowed with direct realization of the Supreme Absolute Truth will impart divine knowledge to you.’

“Here we also find the qualifications of guru: *jnaninas, tattva darsinah*. One must be learned in scriptural knowledge, not teaching anything deviating from that, and fixed in the absolute truth through direct realization/revelation. “



Sripad Puri Maharaja, Rasaraja das Prabhu, and Jayadev das Prabhu

“*Pariprasnena* means submissive inquiry. There must be humility and obedience but we must also inquire about what we may not understand, with genuine, sincere questions. We want to make spiritual progress and that comes with the revelation of spiritual knowledge and realization. There must also be service (*sevaya*) because that is the realization we seek to attain as *krsnera nitya dasa*, eternal servants of Krishna. Sri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu teaches Sanatan Goswami in *Sri Chaitanya Charitamrita, Madhya* 2.108, *jīvera 'svarūpa' haya-kṛṣṇera 'nitya-dāsa*.” Sripad Puri Maharaja explained.

“Blind following may mean we have faith in the divine service world, but we may not yet see or experience it. Still we follow faithfully until our mind and heart is purified, and the Lord deigns to reveal Himself and the spiritual world to us. As long as we remain enamored with exploiting the pleasures of material existence the divine world will remain invisible to us. Renouncing the world, however, will not bring us the desired positive result. It will only land us in the nether regions, between the material and spiritual worlds. The spirit of dedication, devotional service, divine love will awaken our consciousness of the spiritual reality which is the true home of the soul,” Sripad Puri Maharaja concluded.

Explaining further perspectives Sripad Pur Maharaja said, “Guru, *sadhu* (recognized devotees), and *sastra* (authentic scripture) should be in agreement. In this way we can understand what is

authentic. It is not merely some blind process. That is to be avoided. Deep inquiry is required, otherwise we can be misled by some provincial understanding and the universal truth – that which is true for everyone regardless of their provincial viewpoint – will be missed.”

Continuing, Sripad Puri Maharaja said, “Plato taught that leaning involves recollecting the truth of which we are always and already a part, but due to forgetfulness (otherwise known as *Maya*) we become absorbed in the false conception of material life in which we think of ourselves apart from God. Thus by hearing from guru, associating with devotees, and engaging in the process of bhakti yoga or devotional service activities, and by chanting the Holy Names, we can revive our consciousness of the divine world, and by grace of guru and devotees we can become purified and in a practical way gradually establish our service relation in that world.”

“Can you elaborate a little more on what exactly *prem* means?” first time guest Mike asked.

“*Prema* means unalloyed love, without any exterior motivation, love for its own sake, or love that loves itself. Especially from Rupa Goswami, one of the personal associates of Sri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu, we learn the different stages of development of *prema* beginning from faith. No one can claim to have achieved *prema* without faith. Without faith or implicit trust in guru and Krishna, one cannot properly understand or develop *prema*. Love is not something we can hold in our hands. It is not a body. Yet we all have some idea and experience of love. In the exchange of love between Radha and Krishna, each becomes lost in the other, so that They do not know Who is Who. Seeing oneself in the other is possible only when there is complete purity, because the sincere heart or pure love cannot accept what is impure. These are the things that occupy a devotee’s mind and heart, and are found to be described in the *bhakti* literature. At the same time we are advised not to try to understand this by our own endeavor but to allow that knowledge and realization to manifest itself by the grace of Guru Gauranga Radha Krishna. Love is not impersonal, everything is conceived as personal in the Vedic tradition. That’s why faith is essential for awakening true love. We have full faith that by Their grace divine Love will embrace us when They are satisfied with our purity of purpose. That humble attitude will ensure that we will not approach the highest perfection of life tainted with our own imperfect imagination” Sripad Puri Maharaja concluded.

“Why is it that they say you have to approach a living *guru* in the sense that you just cannot read the words or hear the lectures?” Bhakta Mike asked. “Because it is not just the words or the text or the sound. We want the living experience of what we read or hear and conceive in our own subjectivity. If we can do everything on our own then why are there so many educational institutions? We accept learning from a teacher

about so many practical matters, yet when it comes to religion and philosophy everyone thinks the only qualification necessary to be an expert is a birth certificate. But just because everyone has a foot does not make them automatically expert shoemakers. Of course, guru is not an ordinary teacher. Krishna says, *acharya mam vijaniat,* 'know that I am the guru.' If we are actually seeking Krishna and realize that Krishna is coming to us in the form of guru then there should be no difficulty accepting guru."

"Why can't that transmission go through the recordings of their voices, through their words in the books? Bhakta Mike followed-up with. "Yes, their teachings do come to us through books and recordings, but they are passive teachers. We can examine them, but they can't examine us. Do we think ourselves so perfect that we are not capable of misconception? We may need someone more expert than ourselves or with a different viewpoint than our own to confirm, improve or correct our personal understanding. Most importantly of all, guru is there to chastise us and break the false egoism of independence that is the fundamental root that binds us to the material conception of life. This may not happen with book learning. Rather it may even help foster our false sense of independence and lead us to think we know everything simply by our own prowess without surrender that stands at the threshold of the spiritual world," Sripad Puri Maharaja responded.

"Srla Siddantha Saraswati Thakur said that *Mayavadis* can't chant the Holy Name just like you can't taste the honey in a bottle by simply licking the bottle. They think they are tasting the Holy Name but you have to receive that connection from *guru* to be able to taste the honey in the bottle. It is a heart transaction, from the heart of the *guru* to the heart of the sincere seekers - the disciples," Rasaraja das Prabhu interjected.



Your humble servant,
Kushum Devi Dasi
(New York)



Caring Donations
Via
Pay Pal
seva@bvscs.org

Photos from Sripad Bhakti Vijnana Muni Maharaja and Sripad Bhakti Niskam Shanta Maharaja participation in the Mystics and Scientists conference in London, UK. Also at London Sri Chaitanya Saraswat Math
April 7 2018



Sripad Bhakti Vijnana Muni Maharaja and Sripad Bhakti Niskam Shanta Maharaja

[1] Abhirama Gopala Thakura –
<https://gopinathmath.wordpress.com/2011/04/23/sri-abhiram-thakuras-dissapearance-day/>