



PRINCETON BHAKTI VEDANTA INSTITUTE

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Sri Guru Tattva

Muti-talented Rasaraja das Prabhu switched between Dhol (drum) and kartals (hand cymbals) while Syamasundara das Prabhu on guitar opened Harinam Sankirtan under our long time favorite tree on Princeton University's campus. However, due to many students still taking their final exams, we were told our kirtan was too loud. We then returned to Princetons' Palmer Square Park and continued our Hariman Sankirtan before returning to the Bhakti Vedanta Institutes' (BVI) office for our weekly *sadhu sanga* with Sripad Bhakti Madhava Puri Maharaja, Ph.D (Sripad Puri Maharaja).



Prabhus Syamasundara on guitar, Rasaraj on Dhole and kartals

Referring to my recent *diksha* (mantra) initiation, Dorothy asked, if now I am a guru also like Sripad Puri Maharaja. In explaining the meaning and purpose of *harinama* (Holy Name of God) and *diksha* initiation, Sripad Puri Maharaja said, "*Harinam* initiation is the main initiation. This is what opens up our hearts and minds to the plane of *divya jnana* (transcendental knowledge). Initiation is like getting a visa for *divya jnana* or the transcendental service world. Without that initial connection to divine knowledge we remain within the mundane plane of our natural birth, or seminal birth. The second birth (*divya jnana*) is necessary to awaken us to our spiritual nature as eternal servants of Krsna. Until we are born again in the transcendental world, we remain on the mundane

platform of knowledge, in the exploitive conception of life. Gayatri mantra initiation is to assist *Harinam* initiation according to Srila Sridhara Maharaja. Krishna's name, *Nama* has a wider expanse than Gayatri mantra." *Sri Caitanya Caritamrta: Antya-lila*, 4.192 confirms this:

*diksa-kale bhakta kare atma-samarpana
sei kale krsna tare kare atma-sama*

"At the time of initiation, when a devotee fully surrenders unto the service of the Lord, Krishna accepts him to be as good as Himself."



Sripad Shanta Maharaj, Dharandra Krishna das Prabhu with & during Kushum devi dasi's *diksha* (mantra) initiation (4/17/16) in Sri Nabadvip Dham, India

"Are there any rules, like for Catholics, restricting the priests from having a wife. Can a guru have a wife?" Dorothy inquired.. "Yes, it is possible. That's not a restriction for a guru in the *grihastha* ashram (householder), but not for one who is a *sannyasa* (renunciate), Sripad Puri Maharaja responded. "Are these rules written someplace?" Dorothy asked. "Yes, they are found in our scriptures." "Generally, the *Acharya* teaches by example, by following the rules. Ultimately Krishna is above rules. In the higher sense, from Krishna's viewpoint, everything is alright. Souls who are liberated from the world of duality,

find nothing to judge wrong or right in the Absolute Good,” Sripad Puri Maharaja responded. “What really matters is not that we simply hear something and learn like that, No. We have to put the knowledge we have into practice. It has to become part of our life. We have to live in that knowledge then it will become real to us – as they say ‘realized.’ That is called realized, actualized knowledge. It becomes real for us and we become freed from the illusory material conception of life.” Ved Gupta ji added that, “You have to surrender to guru. Whatever guru says you have to do.”

“I have been to another temple that honors Krishna and there are gurus there. Does that guru think the same as you think?” Dorothy asked. “Only if they are in the same *sampradaya* (disciple line of devotion) and mood of worship. If the *Acharya* (*achar* means behavior, character), says ‘don’t drink’ but he himself drinks then that won’t work. If he wants to teach ‘don’t drink’ then he cannot drink,” Sripad Puri Maharaja responded then gave an example. “A lady took her son to guru: ‘Gurudeva, my son has this attachment to candy, how do I get him to stop eating candy?’ Guru told her to bring him back after one month. A month later she brought the son back to guru. The child sat in front of guru and guru said ‘don’t eat candy.’ From that day on the child did not eat candy. The mother later returned and said, ‘If that’s all it took - merely to say ‘Don’t eat candy’ then why did you have to say ‘wait one month?’ Then the guru told her ‘Because I didn’t eat any candy for that one month, then I could tell him,’” Sripad Puri Maharaja said laughingly. “Before the guru can convince anyone he himself has to be the example,” Ved ji said then asked where he should visit when he travels to India next month. “Nabadvip and Mayapur is good to visit now but the proper place you should go to is where there is guru. If you can find guru and go there, that is the best place,” Sripad Puri Maharaja responded. Referring to his prior visit to a mandir in Sri Vrindavan Dham, Ved ji said, “When I visited there they were more interested in membership. There’s no guru there, so where do I find guru?” In response Sripad Puri Maharaja said, “If you are sincere, guru will appear in your life. For those who are sincere, guru will appear to them by Sri Krishna’s grace, ‘*ācāryam māmi vijānīyān*.’ Krishna will come in the form of guru to teach you.” *Śrīmad Bhāgavatam* 11.17.27 confirms this.

ācāryam māmi vijānīyān
nāvanmanyeta karhicit
na martya-buddhyāsūyeta
sarva-deva-mayo guruḥ

“One should know the *ācārya* as Myself and never disrespect him in any way. One should not envy him, thinking him an ordinary man, for he is the representative of all the demigods.”

“Not only sincere, I think they must have other qualifications also like easily forgive and humility,” Dorothy said. “Yes, very nice. When we come to guru, we must have faith. That is the disciples qualification,

otherwise nothing will happen. We must have faith (Sanskrit *shradda*), and before faith we have to have a pure heart, *sukriti*. We should not be motivated by ulterior purposes. We have to have a good heart, then faith, only then proper connection is possible with guru. We have to be humble enough to take instructions, willing to be flexible, to be a student, to be open to learning,” Sripad Puri Maharaja continued.

“Suppose you find something not correct but you have faith in guru, can you accept it?” Ved ji asked. “If you find it is not correct, and it’s unacceptable to you then how are you going to keep your faith there?” Sripad Puri Maharaja responded. “There could be some hidden personal prejudice behind that,” Ved ji said. “There may be, but then you have to inquire about your own self, why am I not accepting? Why do I think this is wrong? It may be my problem, not that I only see fault in guru but if we look at the *shastra* (scriptures) and see what it says and guru is preaching the same thing then it may not be wrong,” Sripad Puri Maharaja continued. “If I come to guru and I say ‘Well, that is wrong’ then how do I know it is wrong? If the *Srimad Bhagavad-gita* says ‘surrender to Krishna, love and serve God’ and guru is teaching that then that is proper guru. If anyone tells us something else then that is not guru.”

“Are there women gurus?” Dorothy asked. “Anyone who can accept that higher knowledge and conception of Krishna consciousness can be guru. The main thing is that guru must be able to free us from illusory material entanglement and connect us with the transcendental platform of the loving service world,” Sripad Puri Maharaja responded. “When you say freedom from your material body, have you ever been outside of your body? Maybe in meditation, I am not sure?” Dorothy asked. “It’s only a matter of realization, of understanding and knowledge,” Sripad Puri Maharaja continued. “How to understand that you are not the body, you have to introspect, mediate on ‘who am I?’ Am I the body, mind, intelligence, ego, or the soul, the servant of God? What am I? If we please guru and Krishna, He will give us proper knowledge – *dadami buddhi yogam ca*.”

At this point, Revant and his mother (Gauri ji) joined us and Sripad Puri Maharaja gave them a brief recap of what was discussed thus far. One of the questions posed by Ved ji was what if we find guru is saying something wrong, then how do we know it is wrong? Is it something guru is saying that is wrong, or is it something I am seeing as wrong? “*Shastra* tells us, ‘surrender to Krishna’ *sarva dharmam parityaja mam ekam saranam vraja, Bhagavad-gita* 18.66. So if guru is teaching the same thing we are finding in *shastra* then we may accept it as right, but if guru is saying something that is not found in *shastra* then we can ask guru if it’s right or wrong,” Sripad Puri Maharaja said. “Guru instructs according to his *guru, sadhu, and shastra*, in this way it is easy to understand.”

Dorothy asked if it is necessary to attend a seminary, to be trained under an instructor to become a guru as they do in the Catholic religion and if there’s a pyramidal hierarchy the guru needs to follow. “To become guru you first have to become a disciple of guru, then if you follow very nicely,

properly under guru's guidance, then you may become qualified to be guru if guru says you are qualified," Sripad Puri Maharaja responded. She then asked how long that process will take to be qualified. "It may take one year, one second or several lifetimes. It is not something for which you can give a formula. It is not some formula you can follow, 'Now I've done this and I've done that, so now I can become guru,' There is no formula. Only by gurudeva's grace, by the Lord's sweet will, can anyone be guru. If you teach others about Krishna, you are also guru," Sripad Puri Maharaja replied.



L to R: Guests: Gauri ji, Prabhus: Revant, Shyamasundara das, Sripad Puri Maharaja, Guests: Dorothy and Ved ji

She further asked if all gurus are approved to have disciples or if a special reference is required to take on a disciple. "If one is actually guru, he may take disciples, but he doesn't have to take disciples," Sripad Puri Maharaja responded. "One should not be guru unless he can free his disciples from birth and death. Unless he can teach them how to become immortal or how to attain their eternal identity as *nityera krsnadasa* (eternal servants of Krishna), he should not become guru. The *param guru* (predecessor guru) is one who can teach us how to get free from material entanglement and live one's life totally in connection with Krishna *seva* (service)."

"How many people are above you?" was Dorothy's follow up question. "Everyone," Sripad Puri Maharaja responded as the group laughed. She then asked if he doesn't need to be supervised by a "super-guru."

"Guru sees everyone as his guru. If you want to become free of material life, you cannot think yourself to be superior to everyone else otherwise you cannot remember your own surrender to guru," Sripad Puri Maharaja responded. "She's comparing this to the Christian system that the Pope is only one at the top and the rest of the priests belong under him. No, the gurus can be in the same level. It doesn't mean that there's only one guru like the Pope is the only one," Rasaraja das Prabhu said.

"Guru is a matter of realization - what knowledge one has received by surrender and service to guru. If anyone has some realization of Krishna consciousness they can be guru. If you know what God is, how to serve Krishna through His devotees, you can teach that to others, otherwise what are you teaching? You can only give to others what you have, not what you don't have." Sripad Puri Maharaja

explained. "If we are trying to develop God consciousness, then we have to go to someone who has that and can give it to us."

Dorothy then asked how can the public recognize when someone becomes a guru or if there's a ceremony to announce his/her 'graduation' to "guruhood" since the "new" guru can go to different area and open up another center. "The recognized guru of a particular Math (spiritual institution) may or may not announce in public who is the next guru. An actual guru is self-manifest by the specific power invested in guru by Krishna. Whoever knows Krishna is not interested in becoming guru. They know that divine realization is the highest thing and to serve God is the aim, the ultimate purpose of life for guru and everyone else, and that is what he teaches to others. The aim is not to be guru but to surrender to and serve Krishna and His devotees," Sripad Puri Maharaja said. "I thought that by making many gurus you help to spread the religion," Dorothy said. In agreement, Sripad Puri Maharaja said, "Yes, but the emphasis is not on making gurus but distributing this knowledge of Krishna consciousness - the knowledge that Krishna is there and we are His servants. That teaching, that understanding, that realization is what we want to expand. To distribute that realization to others is the highest thing: to first understand what is God, how to come to that transcendental platform of spiritual serving life and to distribute that knowledge widely. Through this type of teaching we are expanding that realization and consciousness. We want to become Krishna conscious and anyone who can help us and enlighten us about that is guru."

"What is the fault in accepting Krishna as a true guru?" Revant ji asked. "Yes, but there's a problem with that conception," Sripad Puri Maharaja responded. "The problem is it relies too much on our own imagination. We can fool or cheat ourselves like that. We can say, 'Oh, I am Krishna conscious. I am surrendered to God. I am serving Krishna' and so many things we can say but what is the evidence, the proof? Krishna doesn't accept that. Krishna says 'One who worships me is not My devotee, but one who worships my devotee is my devotee.' If we have to serve a devotee then we have a real person there we have to surrender to who can correct our misconceptions," Sripad Puri Maharaja said then asked, but then how do we know that a person is a real devotee? "We will know because he has to be a genuine disciple of a devotee and like that the *guru parampara* goes back to the original guru, Krishna."



**L to R: Sripad Bhakti Vijnana Muni Maharaja, Sripad Bhakti Niskama Shanta Maharaja, His Divine Grace Om Vishnupad Srila Bhakti Nirmal Acharya Maharaja and Sripad Rasik Sannyasi Maharaj
(photo by: Dinodayal das Prabhu)**

“When there’s a long chain of information, it’s inevitable that the information is modified or lost, isn’t it?” was Revant Prabhu’s follow-up question. “Then Krishna has to come Himself to correct it. In *Bhagavad-gita* Krishna says to Arjuna ‘*yada yadi hi dharmasya glanir bhavati bhārata,*’ whenever there’s a decline in the religious teachings I come Myself and re-establish it.’ That’s why there are *avatars*, incarnations. He comes to correct that knowledge when it’s lost,” Sripad Puri Maharaja responded. Srila Sridhar Maharaja *Bhagavad Gita - The Hidden Treasure of the Sweet Absolute*, 4.7 confirms this.

yada yada hi dharmasya
glanir bhavati bhārata
abhyutthanam adharmasya
tadatmanam sramyam aham

“O Bhārata, whenever there is a decline of religion and an uprising of irreligion, I personally make My advent.”

“It has been 5,000 years since Krishna last came, then we can expect in these past 5,000 years His teachings has been distorted,” Revant Prabhu said. “Yes, so He came again as Caitanya Mahaprabhu 500 years ago to correct whatever was lost. He also sent so many representatives who have preserved that knowledge and are teaching it today. His teachings are clear. It is not that it is so difficult to understand. In the *Gita*, concerning guru, Krishna says ‘*tad viddhi pranipatena, pariprasnena sevaya*’” Sripad Puri Maharaja responded. This is confirmed in *Bhagavad Gita - The Hidden Treasure of the Sweet Absolute*, 4.34:

tad viddhi pranipatena
pariprasnena sevaya
upadeksyanti te jnanam
jnaninas tattva-darsinah

“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.”

“*Tad viddhi* means when you want to know the truth, what is the first thing you should do? *Pranipatena*’ means to be respectful and humble – ‘I don’t know what is the truth. I have no idea’ just like Descartes (René Descartes - French philosopher, mathematician, and scientist) said, ‘I don’t know. I doubt everything. I don’t know if anything is true or not.’ Likewise Socrates (Greek philosopher) said ‘I only know that I know nothing.’ This is *pranipatena* – to bow down before guru with this attitude. *Tad viddhi* – you want to know the truth, then start with ‘I don’t know the truth,’ then you are getting close to knowing the truth. *Pariprasnena sevaya* – you may ask questions, inquire, but who are

you going to inquire from? You can inquire from within yourself like Descartes and Socrates did but the *Gita* advises to approach a guru with that same questioning attitude,” Sripad Puri Maharaja explained. “Humble respect first, then inquiry, then *sevaya* (service). Service is the test - the real examination. To serve means to realize there is a higher conception than oneself, otherwise we become mere imitators, simply maintaining our exploiting mentality as overlords. Without a serving mood, there’s no conception or connection with any higher truth. One will remain in a localized self-centered conception of reality which is called ego, *ahankar*. The ego is like a black hole, drawing everything it contacts into itself and letting nothing out. Without service even if one comes in connection with guru he will only try to exploit guru for selfish interests. The ego centric world consists in what is localized around oneself, so we have to learn how to go beyond that through faith and service.”

“Is there a well-defined procedure on how to break *ahankar*?” Revant ji asked. “Yes - obedient service to guru. Don’t go to guru merely to ask questions and get knowledge or anything else for yourself but to serve the higher conception that guru represents. The higher conception is personal, and it comes through guru. There’s a person there, ask yourself ‘What can I do for that person, how can I serve that person, how can I please that person?’ That takes a real conception, a genuine realization that I am an actual servant of a servant. Anyone can say ‘I serve God’ but to serve a devotee of the Lord is not just imaginary anymore,” Sripad Puri Maharaja said. “If you think you are serving guru and guru says ‘you are not doing anything for Krishna, you are only imitating, doing it all for your own prestige’ then you will have to look within yourself. Are you following the principles? Are you understanding *shastra*? Or are you just interested in *kanak, kamini, pratishtha* - money, sex or prestige (greed, lust, pride)? What are you interested in? Are you interested in exploiting the environment or in serving a humble servant of Krishna?”

After a brief pause, “We should not see guru as an ordinary man. Guru is the representative of God. If we can see guru as the representative of God or servant of God, then we are getting close to real knowledge because God is simultaneously different and not different from His creation or energy,” Sripad Puri Maharaja continued. “There is nothing that is not God except illusion. That requires knowledge to understand and that knowledge can come only by the grace of guru. By serving guru we can safely learn and realize these things. *‘jnaninas tattva-darsinah*’ The wise who have seen and are living that truth, they can teach that truth to us. We find this process is given in the *Gita* in this one verse of how to break free of our ego. The only way you can verify it is by trying it, apply yourself to that knowledge.”

Revant ji further inquired if there are easier methods. “Yes, there are easier methods. You can start with *śravaṇaṁ kīrtanaṁ viṣṇoḥ smaraṇaṁ*^[1] - coming to hear or listen to *hari katha* or just chanting the Holy Names, *vishnu smaraṇaṁ*, remembering the Lord - but ultimately you must come to *pāda-sevanam*, learning how to serve in a very humble way at the feet

of guru. You can begin in any way but the simplest way is just by continued hearing and maybe one day becoming purified and convinced about what you are hearing. If by hearing it becomes so much a part of us that we begin *kirtanam*, chanting, repeating this knowledge to others that's a little higher platform," Sripad Puri Maharaja responded. "In that way, slowly, we can make progress in whatever way we can."



Back Row: Gauri ji, Rasaraja das Prabhu, Mid-Row: Ved ji, Dorothy with Sripad Puri Maharaj, Front Row: Prabhus: Revant and Shyamasundara das. Second Photo: L to R: Gauri ji with Kushum devi dasi and Dorothy

In a recent visit to a mandir Dorothy found the deity of Sri Krishna "black" and wanted to know why He is black. "'Krishna' means black or dark," Sripad Puri Maharaja responded. "We know Krishna as black because we cannot see black. If you look into outer space, it is black, you cannot see anything, so black means you cannot see it. You are seeing so many things but you don't see God, right?" Sripad Puri Maharaja said. Pointing to her heart, Dorothy said, "but I have Him here." In agreement, Sripad Puri Maharaja said, "Ahh, yes. Krishna is not to be seen with these eyes directly. But He is seeing us just like you, as the seer, cannot see yourself. Similarly God is the ultimate seer so how can we see Him? He can see us but we cannot see Him but we know He's there through our heart, our faith. If He wants to show Himself then that's another thing, He can do that. If we saw God in our present position, we would want to exploit Him also. 'Oh you are God, I want this, I want that.'" After a brief pause, Sripad Puri Maharaja said, "Whether we see Krishna in a black or a white *murti* (deity), doesn't matter, as long as we remember that He cannot be seen by our material eyes except by His mercy, but He can see us. His actual transcendental form is inconceivable to us – thus He is black."

"Is Srimati Radharani part of Maya (illusion) or the divine?" Revant Prabhu asked. "Radha (is Krishna's *shakti*, or energy) and is non-different from Krishna (source of energy). Krishna is the original source, the *adi-purush*. We are all part of Radha-Krishna's energy," Sripad Puri Maharaja responded. "Radha is the internal energy that is connected with Krishna through *prema* or love. That which connects Krishna's energy with Krishna is Radha. Krishna's energy is only to be used for Krishna, not for other purposes, so Radha is that potency of loving connection with Krishna."

"Revant was thinking that whenever you think of Radha you should pray that She go away from you because He sees Her as an obstacle,

a negative energy to reach Krishna but I told him 'I don't think so. I think Radha is a part of Krishna. She is intrinsic to Krishna and just because She represents the feminine energy of love, doesn't mean you shun Her," Gauri ji said. "We want to serve Radharani because by Her love She is attracting even Krishna. She's giving the loving potency to the energy being utilized for Krishna. Krishna's energy should be utilized for Krishna," Sripad Puri Maharaja responded. "We should understand that all energy is coming from Him. Therefore when we eat, we don't just take food and eat it, we first offer it to Radha-Krishna. 'Lord you have given this to us. It is your mercy (*prasad*) so we offer it with love to You in remembrance that it is coming from You. It is Your love that is sustaining us.' That exchange of love is Radha-Krishna. *Aradhana* means to worship, so Radha worships Krishna with Her service – Krishna's energy (*Shakti*) lovingly serves the source Him (*Shaktiman*). Srila Prabhupada said Krishna is the Supreme Personality of Godhead but Radha is the Supreme Servitor Godhead. Therefore if we want to serve Krishna there is nothing higher than serving His best servitor, *Radha dasya* - we want to serve Radha and Her servitors."

"In the spiritual world, Radha-Krishna are the Personification of the exchange of love called *prema*. There His spiritual energy is engaged solely in the loving service of Krishna, under the influence of Radha's potency called *Yoga Maya*. In the material conception of life we exploit the energy of the Lord for other purposes unrelated to Krishna. When we utilize the environment for our own glorification, our own satisfaction, that's the influence of *Maha Maya*, under the deluding potency of *Mayadevi*. *Maha Maya* leads to material entanglement and away from Krishna, that is *Maya*," Sripad Puri Maharaja explained. "So *Shakti* misdirected is *Maya*?" Gauri ji asked. "Yes, *shakti* mis-utilized is a life of illusory existence under the influence of *Maya*. *Maya*'s business is to make us think we are independent and separate from Krishna and we can utilize the energy of the Lord for our own purposes, forgetful of Krishna," Sripad Puri Maharaja responded. "Mayadevi governs the illusory external energy leading away from Krishna. Radha governs the internal energy of loving service to Krishna.."

Sadly our most nourishing and energized *sangha* came to an end after *prasadam* was served and honored by all.



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