



PRINCETON BHAKTI VEDANTA INSTITUTE

REPORT - MAY 20, 2017

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The Varieties of Religion

Accompanied by Sripad Bhakti Madhava Puri Maharaja. PhD, (Sripad Puri Maharaja) on *kartals*, Rasaraja das Prabhu on *mridangam* began our Princeton's Bhakti Vedanta Institute (BVI) *sanga* with Harinam Sankirtan.



Rasaraja das Prabhu with Sripad Puri Maharaja and guest, Zhanna during Harinam Sankirtan

Opening with a question, Kushum devi asked why are there so many religions. "Krishna says in the *Bhagavad-gita* 'ye yatha mam prapadyante, tams tathaiva bhajamy aham - As they surrender to Me, I reward them accordingly. I reciprocate with them according to their worship of Me.' Those who want to relate to God in a certain way He gives them the ability to do that. Man proposes and God disposes," Sripad Puri Maharaja responded. Srila Bhakti Raksaka Sridhara Maharaja's^[1] *Bhagavad Gita - The Hidden Treasure of the Sweet Absolute*: chapter 4 Verse 11: The Path of Knowledge, confirms this:

*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 Pârtha, all men follow My various paths."

"One cannot act without God's sanction. Nothing works without God. Krishna says 'aham sarvasya prabhavo - I am the source of everything. Everything is coming from Me. I am the cause of all causes. You are not independent of Me but I reciprocate with you,'" Sripad Puri Maharaja explained. "If it's a spiritual reality that we want or need God provides that - a reciprocation between Man and God." This is confirmed in *Bhagavad Gita - The Hidden Treasure of the Sweet Absolute*, 10.8:

*aham sarvasya prabhavo
mattah sarvam pravartate
iti matva bhajante mam
budha bhava-samanvitah*

"I am Krsna, the Sweet Absolute, the origin of all. The entire universe of material and transcendental play, activity, purpose, and the Vedas and allied scriptures which give Guidance -all evolve from Me alone. Realizing this hidden treasure, persons of fine theistic intelligence surpass the mundane and embrace the path of love divine, *râga-marga*, and adore Me forever."

"Not everyone is the same, there are differences as well as oneness/sameness. For example, the universe is one universe but it is made up of many different entities. In that way we may understand that God is one but He has many different energies. We are all His energies. However we relate to Him, He provides the means to do that," Sripad Puri Maharaja continued. "There are many different people throughout the world who have different circumstances they live in, and they develop certain mentalities due

to their inclinations. Krishna provides a system for everyone, not that one size fits all - it's not like that. There are different religious paths for different people but it's not that there are different Gods. There's only one God and His energies and Forms are unlimited." In emphasizing his point, Sripad Puri Maharaja said, "If there's a big diamond in the sky then from every side you may see a different color of the same diamond according to its surroundings. One side you might see it pink, yet on another side it appears yellow or blue, or red, or white. It is the same diamond but it appears to different people according to their perspective. In a similar way people worship God in different manners according to their perspective, ability, inclination, understanding and their spiritual development."



Prabhus: Nila Madhava das, Rasaraja das with Sripad Puri Maharaja

In another example, he said, "Just as the nomads in the desert can't be told to follow a vegetarian diet, because where are they going to grow their food? They have to use whatever means they have for survival, and that may require a non-veg diet. This is what you will find in a desert religion. Because Jesus was talking to fishermen he could not tell them to give up eating fish. It was not possible for them. Thus different principles are given to different people according to their ability to follow," Sripad Puri Maharaja explained. "The main point in all of the different religions, however, is the same: to develop love of God, to develop your relationship with God. If they understand that principle then any religion of a particular nature may be adopted by them so they can follow it according to their ability to understand."

"*'Ye yatha mam prapadyante, tams tathaiva bhajamy aham'* is a very balanced, fair and equanimous system. Everyone gets according to their deserts. Krishna is like that. It's not an imposition on the different souls. They have their freedom and according to how much they want to surrender, to serve Krishna, He provides that opportunity for them," Sripad Puri Maharaja continued. "Snila Sridhar Maharaja told that 'if you want to be cheated, Krishna will provide that for you also.' You think that you can get something for nothing, Krishna will provide a corrective solution for you. You have the opportunity to think like that but if you want to be sincere, there will be a proper channel for you to follow, where you can be fulfilled to the highest degree. Krishna is not demanding anything

from us except our sincerity and with that sincerity we can come to the truth. Krishna wants us to surrender to Him, so that is a process, '*sarva-dharman parityajya* - give up everything else and Surrender to Me.' Krishna wants everything from us, as much as we are willing to give, He will give to us also. He will give Himself to you. If we want something other than God, He will give that to you. If you want God, He will give Himself to you also, but the main problem is we want something other than God." *Bhagavad Gita - The Hidden Treasure of the Sweet Absolute*, 18.66 confirms this:

*sarva-dharman parityajya
mam ekam saranam vraja
aham tvam sarva-papebhyo
moksaisyami ma sucah*

"Give up all kinds of religion and surrender to Me alone.
I will liberate you from all sins, do not despair."



Our Guru Parampara

"Human greed," guest, Zhanna said. "Whatever it may be - greed, lust, prestige - all these things will not get you the higher, spiritual attainment, Sri Krishna - Reality the Beautiful. The only want we should have is to submit to what Krishna wants, to try to come to that position of what Krishna wants. My only motive should be to fulfill that aim. I have no motive, ambition for anything else. No material ambition," Sripad Puri Maharaja responded. "*'Bahunam janmanam ante'* After many births we become wise enough to understand this. In other words after living in this world for so many lifetimes, we don't know how many life times we have already gone through already, one somehow gets the message that 'I've done all these mundane things before so it's all the same thing over and over again.' After doing the same thing over and over again, you don't get any pleasure out of that anymore and you think 'I worked, made money, had a nice family, car, business, house, fame, popularity,' then what? After sometime we become wise and surrender to Krishna. 'I am just in this rat race. I've done this before and it doesn't hold any interest for me anymore. I am looking for something higher and I am not finding it in all these mundane pursuits. They don't give me what I really want.' Such persons are wise. Experience has taught them the lessons that they were supposed to learn. Then they come to think "I can only be satisfied with God. All our loves, the people who love us, who we love, they are wonderful but they have their limitation, their end. But I am looking for something permanent, the most secure thing, the highest love, which is unlimited, with whom I have an unlimited loving relation. And that can only be found with the Lord and His devotees.' Those who become wise have developed that kind of intelligence. '*Sa mahatma su-durlabhah.*' That kind of rare soul is

very hard to find.” *Bhagavad Gita - The Hidden Treasure of the Sweet Absolute*, 7.19 confirms this:

*bahunam janmanam ante
jnanavan mam prapadyate
vasudevah sarvam iti
sa mahatma su-durlabhah*

“After many births, the enlightened soul {blessed with devotional association} realizes that everything is of the nature of {subordinate to} Vāsudeva, and thus he surrenders unto Me. Such a great soul is very rare.”

“Those great souls are the spiritual masters (guru) of everyone. What they have learned they can teach to others,” Sripad Puri Maharaja continued. “‘*Bahunam janmanam ante*.’ ‘*bahunam*’ means many, ‘*ante*’ means after, ‘*janmanam*’ means births, ‘*jnanavan mam prapadyate*’ one becomes intelligent enough to surrender to Vasudeva Krishna. When one stops trying to get so many different types of satisfaction then one may turn to surrender to Krishna.’ You know the saying ‘Let go, let God’. Let go of all the material pursuits for so many temporary things and let God be the center of your life. Let God take control of your heart.”

“In that verse, it says with every birth we get some intelligence, but we see that every time we are born, we forget everything from the previous life. So is it more like we get some *sukriti* (good merits) in this life time?” Rasaraja das Prabhu asked. “That is true. But it’s not like all those lifetimes are wasted. The experiences from the things that we have learned from the past are with us. We cannot remember it but it has formed our present destiny. They are called *parabdhas*,” Sripad Puri Maharaja explained. “Is it like our intuition?” Rasaraja das Prabhu followed-up with. “Our *karma* is there when we go from life to life; we carry something with us. The subtle body carries us over from the previous lives and that has built up a kind of internal trace that’s called *akash*. Some people are born with certain talents, like Beethoven, or someone like that. As a child they are already a musician from birth, so from whence did they get that? Thus there’s something we carry over from previous lives. Even a child when it is born has some kind of a personality already. That is what that verse is saying, we carry something over. We do become wise. The *sukriti* (good merit) actually comes from having a relationship with Krishna by contact with His devotees. If a spiritually advantageous situation arises, one who has developed a sense of piety realizes that there’s something greater than myself to honor,” Sripad Puri Maharaja continued.

“Regarding what Rasaraja was saying that we do not recall anything of our prior lives, I was thinking when we have different dreams and in these dreams I was performing tasks that I never performed before such as composing and conducting music. I am thinking maybe

sometime in the dreams we have glimpses to what we probably did in our prior lives,” guest, Zhanna remarked. “Yes, we are all continuing on from something we’ve developed in our past lives. We all don’t just start like a blank slate. In this life we may come in contact with someone like Srila Prabhupada and we feel an internal connection with him. Where does that come from? I never even dreamed of coming in contact with Srila Prabhupada or Srila Sridhar Maharaja in my life. I never planned for that. Yet suddenly Srila Prabhupada appeared in our lives and we derived so much spiritual benefit from his teachings and association. I think when such unplanned things happen in our lives that give us such an impetus to go on in the spiritual direction we recognize the hand of God in it. In Sanskrit the spiritual inspiration that comes in our hearts is called *caitya guru*,” Sripad Puri Maharaja continued. “Not everyone who comes in contact with a devotee feels desire to further that relationship. Something in our lives made us ready for that connection with Srila Prabhupada. As a child, I was always very interested in God. I thought if there’s a God, then He must be the most important thing in our lives but the opportunity to develop that feeling only came through contact with a guru (spiritual teacher) otherwise how else will we learn about something like that,” Sripad Puri Maharaja asked then responded, “I was a Catholic but found the teachings of the church to be unsatisfactory. It was nice but it wasn’t sufficient.”

“It happened to me too. I went to catholic school and some things they teach makes no sense. There are questions but they have no answers,” Rasaraja das Prabhu said. “I have friends that go to church but I see what they do in real life, then I think I don’t want to go there,” guest, Zhanna said. “I see what they do in real life and I don’t see any Godliness in that. What they do, how they conduct their business or treat some people, in my mind it doesn’t go together with God consciousness or a religious person. I feel like they are putting on a cloak because ‘I pray and I go to church’ while a few minutes after the sermon is over and they are outside of the church, they become evil. They are telling me I have to go to church and I say ‘No, I will not go to church.’ I think it is insincere from my point-of-view.”

“We call that show-bottle religion. The bottle is pretty on the surface but inside there’s nothing valuable,” Sripad Puri Maharaja interjected. “Show-bottle means it is not very deep.”

“You do things that you shouldn’t do, then they tell you to go and confess and you are forgiven. I don’t like that,” Zhanna continued. “People do things out of duty. People go to church because they know it is their duty. They feel obligated that because ‘I am a Catholic, Muslim, Hindu, Christian, then I have to go to church or temple’ and if you are not going to church you are not doing what God wants you to do - but that is duty. That is called *dharma* (duty) in Sanskrit. *Dharma* means you do what you are supposed to do but that is not the real spiritual process. That is not

surrender. Surrender doesn't mean you are doing it because it is your duty to do it. Only one who has realized that 'I am the servant of God. I have a real personal relation with God as a servant.' Then it is not a question of duty anymore at that point. There's a feeling, a relationship of servitorship and love," Sripad Puri Maharaja explained.



BVI Altar at Princeton Bhakti Vedanta Institute

"For example, how can regular church-goers claim to be spiritual and still eat meat? Doesn't one of the Ten Commandments say, Thou shall not kill? How are we to understand that they are truly spiritual?" Kushum asked. "It is very hard for them to understand. They think killing means only murder of another human being, but 'killing' means even taking the life of an animal. That is why Krishna says 'sarva-dharman parityajya.' Give up your whole mentality of following your worldly or even religious duties. It is still centered in one's own self-conception within this world rather than in Me. Whatever may be judged proper or improper in the general consideration of the world does not necessarily determine My transcendental Will. Therefore you must surrender your entire self to Me - *mam ekam saranam vraja*. You are one and different from Me as my marginal energy (*tatashtha shakti*) and you have an eternal serving relationship with Me," Sripad Puri Maharaja continued. "God means the Lord and there's no Lord without a subject so our identity with Krishna is constitutional. He can exist without us but we cannot exist without Him. We are His energy and He is the source of that energy so they can't be separated. Like the sun and the sun rays. The sun rays are not separate from the sun. When the sun rays come into our room it's not that the sun is in our room, so they are different from the sun, yet can you imagine the sun without its rays or the rays without the sun? They are different yet they are one. Our relationship with God is like that. We are different but we are also one or united with God. Those who are simply doing their duty without this realization are not getting the most secret knowledge (*sarva guhyatamam*)."

"I have taken a course on the Bible and the professor says that the Bible was written in Hebrew and then it was translated into many different languages. So that's why in the commandment where it

says 'thou shall not kill' is not correct. In English the word is 'kill' but in Hebrew it means 'murder,'" guest, Zhanna explained. "She explained that to kill and to murder are two different acts. 'Murder is a premeditated killing, a planned act' and 'killing is accidental.' This is how she explained it to us that 'thou shall not murder.'"

"In the case of the animal, you feed it, raise it on your farm then take it to the slaughter house - this is planned so this is murder," Rasaraja das Prabhu interjected. "In Genesis, in the beginning of the Bible, God created civilization, it says 'I will give you all the fruits and vegetables to eat' then after some concession, it says 'you can eat some kinds of animal.' A specific description was given of the kinds of animal they are allowed to eat. Some regulations were given. Animals will die eventually, so when they die, you can use the meat, the skin, and in this way you don't get any *karma* (bad deeds). All of this was given in the Old Testament but it is changing with time."

Sripad Puri Maharaja said, "They are violating the commandment by killing animals. The Bible says, 'don't kill' yet they are killing animals. So it's contradictory unless the Bible meant 'murder' instead of 'kill.' It is so merciful that we don't have to think about those things because we don't eat meat. We are liberated from all of that karma. Anyhow, we have such nice fruits and vegetable which we offer to Krishna before we eat."

Kushum asked, "According to the Bible, the Lord says that the people should not worship any idol, pictures or anything like that, so why are the followers wearing the cross? Is that not a symbolism of Christ?" Sripad Puri Maharaja replied, "That was never said in the Bible. One of the Lord's Commandments is 'Thou shall not have **false** Gods, or worship a **false** God before Me.' That did not refer to having a symbol, an icon, a picture or a statue of the true God or His associates. The pagans used to worship golden statues as gods, and knew nothing of the Supreme Lord. It was those idols that the Commandments were against. That kind of idol has no relationship to the true God. Worshiping a god of your own making doesn't represent the Supreme Lord Who creates heaven and earth."

With this our wonderful *sadhu sanga* came to an end after *Prasadam* was served and honored by all.

<p style="text-align: center;">Your humble servant, Kushum Devi Dasi (New York)</p>		<p style="text-align: center;">Donations via Pay Pal http://bviscs.org/ donation</p>
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[1] Srila Bhakti Raksak Sridhar Dev-Goswami Maharaj - Founder-President-Acharya: 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)