



# PRINCETON BHAKTI VEDANTA INSTITUTE

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### Real and Apparent

Rasaraja das Prabhu with kartals (hand cymbals) opened Harinam sankirtan at Princeton's Palmer Square Park while I intermittently handed out our brochure before returning to the Bhakti Vedanta Institute (BVI) center for our weekly *sadhu sangha* with Sripad Bhakti Madhava Puri Maharaja, Ph.D (Sripad Puri Maharaja).

"As we are developing spiritually, we naturally begin to eliminate many mundane things around us, while at the same time non-devotees label us as being cold toward them. Why is it like that?" Kushum dd asked.

"No one should feel unloved where there is Krishna consciousness. Where there is no love, there is no Krishna consciousness. When you are making progress a devotee may not give the non-devotee section the attention they want, so they may think you are being cold or indifferent toward them. It's not your intention to be unkind but you are trying to cultivate your serving mood toward guru, vaisnavas and Krishna. Progress involves acceptance and rejection. Your attention

is not directed toward them so they may feel 'why are you behaving like that towards me.' We do not have any ill will rather we want them to come and participate in the Krishna centered activities that we are cultivating," Sripad Puri Maharaja responded.



**L - R: Syamasundara das, Rasaraja das with Sripad Puri Maharaja and Surottama das during *sadhu sangha***

"We have to remember we are engaged in bhakti-yoga (devotional path), a discipline, and it requires that type of indifference toward that which is not favoring progress toward the goal. Like Srila Rupa Goswami taught, 'accept what is favorable and reject what is unfavorable for bhakti (devotion).' When we are in that disciplinary stage, both, us and others may feel

some difficulty but we have to remember what we are doing - trying to cultivate a theistic non-self centered civilization. We also have to be gentle so that we may not let anyone feel rejected. We have to explain as much as possible with affection but not attachment to whatever they are doing while keeping clear vision of our humble service connection under guru," Sripad Puri Maharaja continued. "To a great degree, we are also in that same mentality of material attachment. But we are also trying to purify ourselves from that so that we may come to the transcendental platform. The transcendental consciousness will allow us to see reality as opposed to the appearance of reality."

Sripad Puri Maharaja went on to describe the difference between "real" and "apparent." "When the actor is on stage, his real life is different from the character he is playing on the stage. He makes an appearance on the stage as a king, beggar, criminal or whatever character the role demands - he plays that role. That's the appearance he portrays on the stage but in his real life he's not any of those things. So what he appears as and what he actually is are two different things. Like that there's reality and the appearance of reality. What appears to us, even our own self, is only a creation of false ego. Then what is real? Sripad Puri Maharaja asked then said, "The real is not our egoic self, the real is Krishna - Reality the Beautiful. That requires cultivation of the Krishna consciousness to understand that and that can be done only through faith. From the platform of faith, we can look beyond what is appearing to us, to that which is causing the appearance or illusion (Maya). We experience the illusion of what is real rather than the reality itself - the illusion of

something that is not what it appears to be. For example, when you step on rope in the dark you may think it's a snake. At the same time we must recognize that there is a faith that is based in the subjective, finite self, which is hard-hearted and egoistic and does not rise to the Absolute. And there is a faith that comes down to us from the infinite plane - the halo of Srimati Radharani, faith that comes by Her grace only to Her humble, surrendered servitors."

"There is a Reality that is whole and infinite but it's appearing to us in a partial way because we are finite. Without seeing the elephant, its tail appears to us as a rope, its leg as a tree trunk. This variety of separate identities form an illusion that appears to be real but it is illusory due to our finite vision and cognition. Yet beyond the illusion there is a complete whole, a reality that is actually true. Only when we come to the truth of that reality do we clear up all these illusions and properly understand what is what. We learn the truth of reality from *guru* (spiritual teacher), *shastra* (scripture), *sadhu* (saintly persons). They are never to be considered ordinary appearances of the phenomenal world or sources of ordinary knowledge, One can know reality only by following the path of surrender, giving up all finite sense of separate identity, as described by those transcendental authorities, not by imitating them, but only by the grace of the infinite (which is not impersonal) by Their discretion, being pleased with our honest and submissive service." Sripad Puri Maharaja continued. "Everyone is conditioned to the sphere of finite experience of superficial appearances. By faith one is able to extend one's limited reach beyond the experience and understanding of finite cognition. Reality for us refers to appearance while Reality As It Is - by Itself and for Itself is the

absolute truth. Faith can be either finite or infinite depending on its source. Only faith that comes from the infinite to the finite can properly reach the goal. The infinite is not impersonal and thus can make itself known to the finite by divine grace alone and not by any effort of the finite to comprehend the infinite. Only a child when he sees the Moon thinks he can touch it by reaching out for it.”

The finite mind or understanding (*manas*) and intelligence (*buddhi*) create the illusion or appearance of a separate self and its sensuous world - the material conception of life. Sri Krishna tells Arjuna it is only by surrender (*sharanagati*) can one cross beyond the prison of finite cognition in the *Bhagavad-gita - The Hidden Treasure of the Sweet Absolute* 7.14

*daivi hy esa guna-mayi  
mama maya duratyaya  
mam eva ye prapadyante  
mayam etam taranti te*

“My alluring, ‘trimodal,’ illusory potency is practically insurmountable. However, those who take shelter in Me can overcome this powerful obstacle.”

At this point we began Harinam kirtan led by Rasaraja das Prabhu on dhol and Sripad Puri Maharaja on kartals.



**Rasaraja das Prabhu and Sripad Puri Maharaja during indoors Harinam**

In celebration of the annual Panihati *Chida Dahi Mahotsav*, Sripad Puri Maharaja asked Rasaraja das Prabhu to read from the *Sri Chaitanya Charitamrita (Antya 6.35 – 100)*, which describes the pastimes of the festival of chipped rice mixed with ‘yogurt, soaked in hot milk, condensed milk and an upma like preparation made with vegetables’ in honor of Srila Raghunath Das Goswami and Sri Nityananda Prabhu’s pastimes. This beautiful pastime took place on the banks of the Ganges at Panihati, which commemorates how Mahaprabhu mercifully reciprocated with His devotees through Nityananda Prabhu. *Sri Caitanya-Charitamrta, Antya lila* chapter 6, wonderfully describes this pastime of an ecstatic feast of yogurt, chipped rice, milk and sweetmeat offerings in detail.

“*Chida* means chipped rice, and *dahi* means yogurt. The chipped rice festival took place just before the monsoons, when it is very hot (in India), so naturally the most cooling foods were offered with fruits and sweetmeats. These are both cooling foods, that is why they are taken especially at this time of the year,” Sripad Puri Maharaja explained. “An upma style preparation was also made with different vegetables and grains. Different fruits and sweetmeats were also served. It is a very nice festival. This pastime of the Lord is about how the devotees pleased Nityananda Prabhu (Universal Guru) and by His grace Mahaprabhu also became pleased, and how the Lord reciprocated with all the devotees in the very wonderful and pleasing festival called Panihati *Chida-dahi mahotsav*.”



***Chida-dahi* – Chipped rice in milk, yogurt and condensed milk in earthen ware**

During the reading of *Sri Chaitanya Charitamrita* Sripad Puri Maharaja would intersperse some comments to further explain the background and characters of the pastime. As Rasaraja das Prabhu continued reading everyone became immersed in hearing the wonderful unfolding pastimes of the Lord as sweetly narrated by Srila Krishnadas Kaviraja Goswami.



**Sripad Puri Maharaja with Surottama das Prabhu and Bakula Mataji during *sanga***

Throwing food at one another the two Lords, Nitayanada Prabhu and Chaitanya Mahaprabhu, were jubilantly celebrating Their pastimes at Panihati, but only a few fortunate devotees could understand the transcendental presence of Mahaprabhu at the festival.



**Prabhus: Syamasundara das, Rasaraja das and Nitai das on Srngara mataji's lap**

"After Lord Nityananda Prabhu finished eating, He gave Raghunath the remaining food which was then distributed. A flower garland and betel nuts were offered to Nityananda Prabhu. His body was also smeared with sandalwood pulp. The Lord smiled and chewed the betel nuts but we don't take them," Sripad Puri Maharaja said. "What if Nityananda Prabhu offered them,"

Surottama das Prabhu asked. "Yes, it's okay to accept if He gives them with His own hands," Sripad Puri Maharaja responded. "Nityananda Prabhu then distributed the remaining flower garlands, sandalwood pulp and betel nuts to the devotees."



**Prabhus: Rasaraja das, Syamasundara das and Nitai das with Sripad Puri Maharaja and Matajis: Srngara and Bakula, Surottama das Prabhu (kneeling)**

With this brief narration of the annual Panihati *Chida Dahi Mahotsav*, our weekly *sadhu sangha* concluded. *Prasadam* was then served and honored by all.



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

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