



PRINCETON BHAKTI VEDANTA INSTITUTE

REPORT - AUGUST 27, 2016

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

Janmastami - The Appearance of Bhagavan Sri Krishna

Sripad Bhakti Madhava Puri Maharaja, Ph.D (Sripad Puri Maharaja) with *kartals* (hand cymbals) began chanting Harinam kirtan at the Bhakti Vedanta Institute (BVI) at Princeton University. Accompanied by Rasaraja das Prabhu on dhol (small North Indian-style drum), Syamasundara das Prabhu on guitar and Srngara Mataji on *kartals* we celebrated Sri Krishna's Janmasthmi. "Today we are celebrating the appearance day of Bhagavan Sri Krishna," Sripad Puri Maharaja said as he opened our weekly *sadhu sangha*.



Bhakti Vedanta Institute Altar at Princeton University



L - R: Syamasundara das Prabhu on guitar, Rasaraja das Prabhu on dhol, Sripad Puri Maharaja on kartals and guest, Ralph

Reading from the *Brahma Samhita*,^[1] BVI friend and new guest, Ralph and Cyndi, also participated in the singing of the Sanskrit

text and English translation of the prayer offered by Lord Brahma to Lord Krishna (Vishnu). "*Brahma Samhita* was first revealed to this universe at the beginning of creation. In the Vedic literature, Lord Brahma is the creator. In the Christian philosophy, God is the creator. In the Vedic world, Krishna is God and He has more enjoyable things to do, like playing His flute for example, than creating universes. So the job of creating the worlds is given to His administrator, Lord Brahma," Sripad Puri Maharaja said. "Since even Lord Brahma couldn't do anything on his own, he had to get some revelation from Krishna, Maha Vishnu at that time, on how to create the universe. In meditating on the Lord he composed these beautiful prayers. These prayers are not from this world, they cannot come from a material, mundane source or from any person's imagination or from any experiences we could have since the finite universe was not yet created. These prayers are totally transcendental, manifest from the infinite world."



Sri Krishna's Janmasthmi lila (pastimes)

What is the meaning of Janmasthmi? Janmasthmi is the day that Sri Krishna appears. *Janma* means birth. *Asthmi*

refers to the 8th day of the moon. The Vedic culture uses the lunar calendar so the moon instead of the sun is the standard for determining the time of the year. There are two (2) paths of the moon – *Krishna Paksha* (time from the full moon to the new moon, which is one half of the month) and *Shukla Paksha* is the time from the new moon to the full moon, the other half of the lunar month” Sripad Puri Maharaja explained. “In the month of *Shravan* (August-September) on the 8th day of the moon of the *Krishna Paksha*, Krishna appears.”

“The finite and the infinite – the finite has no access to the infinite except what the infinite reveals to the finite. The only way the finite can gain access to the infinite is if the infinite reveals some minute part of Himself to the finite. This revelation is coming in the form of the *Brahma Samhita* where Lord Brahma utters this transcendental knowledge in his prayers to Krishna (Vishnu) and from there we are getting some idea of Who and what Krishna is. In these prayers Lord Brahma has given us such intimate knowledge of Krishna. No ordinary person of the mundane sphere can have such knowledge. The knowledge of Krishna is not ordinary. It is not something you can acquire through the experiences of this world or get from any ordinary person. It’s not the imagination of a poet, for even they have never spoken of such things about the Supreme Lord, so this is revealed knowledge,” Sripad Puri Maharaja explained.

“The *Vedas* are the literary form of *Shabda* (sacred sound vibration) or revealed knowledge. We may have some thoughts or some feelings within ourselves but how do we make that known to others?” Sripad Puri Maharaja asked then responded, “By speaking/uttering (utter as a verb means outer) our inner thoughts become outer. What is inner becomes outer when we speak. The inner determination becomes uttered for others to grasp in some way what we think and mean. This process that we utilize in our own lives we find also in the Supreme. The Absolute Truth also has an inner essence and He expresses Himself through revelation in words and that is called *Veda* – the revelation of that inner reality of the utter (utter as a verb means ultimate) Absolute Truth. That Absolute Truth can also express Himself in His own words. He doesn’t have to appear or make Himself known in the outer world. Just as we have our own personality within us, but it may not be known to everyone.” Sripad Puri Maharaja said. “When a person walks around in

the world nobody knows his/her personality unless he/she acts or says something so others can understand him/her, or unless you live with, interact with or have some kind of a relationship with that person where you can get to know their personality. So ordinarily when you’re walking around nobody know who you are until they get into that kind of a relationship. Krishna, The Absolute Truth, is like that. He has his own inner personality which is known to His intimate associates and to the degree He reveals Himself to them. In this way Krishna appears to those who love and serve Him.”

“How does Krishna appear in this world?” Sripad Puri Maharaja continued. “Not everyone can understand that. In the *Bhagavad Gita* (4.9) Krishna says, *janma karma ca me divyam* - if one can understand in truth that My birth and activities are all transcendental, that person doesn’t have to take birth again in this world.” This is confirmed in Srila Bhakti Raksaka Sridhara Maharaja’s^[2] *Bhagavad Gita - The Hidden Treasure of the Sweet Absolute*: 4. 9:

*janma karma ca me divyam
evam yo vetti tattvatah
tyaktva deham punar janma
naiti mam eti so 'rjuna*

“O Arjuna, one who comes to know thus the truth of My pastimes of divine birth and activities, does not undergo rebirth. After giving up this body, he attains Me. My grace is revealed to him as My personal transcendental joyful potency, *hlāḍini-sakti*. His heart is melted in divine love and he attains My eternal devotional service.”

“You want to know how to become immortal? Here it is! Krishna is giving the secret. If one can understand how He appears, then no more birth and death for you. You are freed from this *samsara* (cycle of birth and death) that the living entities of this material world must enjoy and suffer. It is very important to understand the truth about the birth and activities of Krishna,” Sripad Puri Maharaja continued. “If we can grasp something of it then it’s a great blessing. We have to meditate on these things. Don’t take it superstitiously or in some light, frivolous way. Truly meditate on these things. Study, especially the *sastras* (scriptures), hear from the *guru* (spiritual teacher) and learn. A matter of eternal life and freedom from death are found in the scriptures. This plane is called *mrtyulok* (plane of death) and the plane of nectar is called *amrit*. *Mrit* and *amrit* are opposites. *Mrit* means death and *amrit* means deathless - the plane of beyond death where there’s no fear anymore, only constant joy. It exist.”

“We may think we have no experience of the eternal but we do have such experience of though we don’t recognize it. It’s the most obvious experience of our lives,” Sripad Puri Maharaja said then asked his audience if they know what it is. “The present moment,” Kushum devi said. “Yes, the present has always been with us from the time we were born to the present moment. That is the only thing that stays with us. It never changes and yet it is always changing. It remains unchanged in the changing. It’s always with us. It is the most important, invaluable and potent thing we experience. We cannot do anything without it and everything we can do is only with it. It’s always there.”



Sadhu Sanga with devotees, guest Cyndi on the right

The present is always there, not the past and not the future,” guest, Ralph remarked. “It’s always there.” Sripad Puri Maharaj responded then quoted Srila Bhaktinod Thakur, “Forget the past that sleeps, and ne’er he future dream at all, but act with the present that is with thee and progress thee shall call.’ Everything we can do is in the present. Thus the eternal is always there with us. We are part of the eternal. It is not a dream or some imaginary thing. It is the most real of all things but we have to learn how to get rid of this concern with the past and future time. That is what is distracting us from the eternal. These are things that require more than external consideration; it’s something of a deeper nature that we have to try to come to terms with.”

“How do we appear or take birth here in this world? Some think that by some combination of fluids in the mother’s body we take birth but that is not how we are born. You can put all the fluids in a test tube but can you get a baby out of those fluids? No, you cannot get it. There has to be a life force there. Chemicals wouldn’t do it. Life has never been made from chemicals. We say life comes from life. It doesn’t come from chemicals or matter. You can combine all the chemicals in the world and many different formulas still you will not get a life or even a single blade of grass from that. The living seed has to be there that has life already in it. You cannot use a dead seed to produce life. So how

is life coming? Life comes from life only. You will not get it out of a rock or matter but only from life itself.”

“Who is that original life, that *Adi Purusham* as we were chanting about in that prayer - *Govindam adi-purusam tam aham bhajami?* *Adi-purusam* means the original, first person from whom all other persons are coming. Govinda (Krishna) is the origin. *Bhaja* means worship. It is the root meaning of *bhakti* (devotion), to devote my love, honor, my worship, everything. We worship that which is held in the highest, most precious position. I give the deepest feeling of my heart, my devotion for that because without the source and ground of my being I am nothing. So what is that source from which I am coming? That is the real substance, the foundation of who I am. That is the real essence,” Sripad Puri Maharaja continued. “The scientists would say ‘everything is made from some electrons.’ The smallest atom is hydrogen and that is made of an electron [and a proton and neutron] but that doesn’t produce consciousness or life. We are not just moving electrons -electricity. Produce all the electricity you want but you cannot produce life. The scientists cannot produce even a grain of rice. We could not live if we were depending on the scientists. Life is the most important principle, not matter, but where is it coming from?” Sripad Puri Maharaj asked then responded. “Life can only come from life. Then who is the first life, the first Person? That is Krishna, *Adi Purusham*. This is what the Vedas reveal. It’s very logical, very simple to understand and very practical knowledge given by Lord Brahma in the *Brahma Samhita*. It’s not some theoretical or philosophical idea. It is scientific. It confirms what we know by our own experience - what we observe, and recognize in our daily lives. It is not some complex theory that we have absolutely no idea what they are talking about with so many technical words and ideas. They may really be impressing one another and people in general but actually they are not giving any real explanation of what life is. If we ask them (scientists) the hard question: ‘Can you make life?’ they cannot answer and they cannot do it. They mention Darwinian evolution and other narratives but they have never produced any life in all the highly advanced and sophisticated laboratories in the world. Yet life has no difficulty in easily and ceaselessly reproducing itself in nature from life.”



Srngara Mataji preparing the vases for the altar

“*Veda* means knowledge or wisdom, from the Sanskrit root *vid*. There we find the highest knowledge but it seems strange to us

because we are not learning that type of knowledge. We are learning all kinds of specialized modern knowledge but its all illusory or apparent knowledge because it leads us in the wrong direction. Phenomenal knowledge or knowledge that is gathered from our own finite perspective doesn't help us to understand Reality *As It Is*. Srila Bhaktivedanta Prabhupada wrote the *Bhagavat Gita As It Is*. The *Gita* is a relatively small book of 700 verses wherein we find knowledge that can actually bring us to a higher platform of knowledge of Reality *as it is by and for itself*, in its infinite or absolute nature and help us to make spiritual progress toward that Absolute knowledge," Sripad Puri Maharaja continued. "Srila Bhakti Rakshak Sridhar Maharaja spoke of 'Reality the Beautiful' and found in his book *Search for Sri Krishna, Reality the Beautiful*. We deserve that kind of knowledge. We are made for that kind of knowledge and not to waste time on phenomenal finite knowledge that may lead to consequences that are not very beautiful because it is finite and therefore imperfect. That can lead to so many difficulties. We can see from our experiences of this world how many difficult and ugly things can happen based on our limited knowledge. But there are also beautiful things and that's the direction we want to make progress toward. We want knowledge that will help make ourselves and our reality that we are part of closer to the beauty, love, charm, affection, and sweetness that is Krishna, the Absolute Truth Personality of Godhead. We are created for that."



Sngara Mataji, Rasaraja das Prabhu with Sripad Puri Maharaja during kirtan

"In the Christian catechism it says we must "Know, love and serve God in this world and be happy with Him in the next." That is the purpose of our life. It's a very simple message but that message gets distorted in so many different ways. People loose contact with that simple message and their lives becomes something else. Religion losses its own focus and becomes something else. Then people claim 'Religion is no good. It's misleading people' such that they don't want anything to do with religion. They say 'I am not religious but I am spiritual,'" Sripad

Puri Maharaja said laughingly. "There is nothing wrong with religion. It's the way it is being mishandled by people. Krishna says that He is the enunciator of the principles of religion, *dharmam tu sakshad bhagavat-pranitam*. Only those who follow religious principles serve His Will, they are sinless and thus are Krishna conscious. This is confirmed in the *Srimad-Bhagavatam: 6.3.19*

*dharmam tu sākshād bhagavat-pranītam
na vai vidur rsayo nāpi devāh
na siddha-mukhyā asurā manudyāh
kuto nu vidyādharma-cāranādayah*

"Real religious principles are enacted by the Supreme Personality of Godhead. Although fully situated in the mode of goodness, even the great *rshis* who occupy the topmost planets cannot ascertain the real religious principles, nor can the demigods or the leaders of *Siddhaloka*, to say nothing of the *asuras*, ordinary human beings, *Vidyādharas* and *Cāranas*."

"*Dharma* means religion in Vedic culture. Because Krishna confirms, 'I enunciate the principles of religion' genuine religion cannot be a man-made fabrication. It has to have a transcendental source that is revealed to us. If we can understand what pure religion is then we wouldn't be misled by thinking of it as a mundane enterprise or means of exploiting and misdirecting people. It is not meant for socializing or parading yourselves in front of others as a pious person either," Sripad Puri Maharaja continued. "Religion means to realign people with their real purpose toward the Krishna centered transcendental world of loving service - the world of real happiness, love and beauty. That's *dharmā*."

"In his prayer Lord Brahma says, '*premanjana-cchurita-bhakti-vilochanena*,' that Shyamasundara appears before the devotees, whose eyes and hearts are imbued with devotion that enables them to see Krishna." This is confirmed in the *Brahma Samhita* (11)

*premanjana-cchurita-bhakti- vilochanena
santah sadaiva hridayeshu vilokayanti
yam shyama-sundaram achintya-guna-svarupam
govindam adi-purusham tam aham bhajami*

"I worship Govinda, the Primeval Lord, Who is Shyamasundara, Krishna Himself with inconceivable innumerable attributes, whom the pure devotees see in their heart of hearts, with the eye of devotion tinged with the salve of love."

"Krishna appears to His devotees. He can appear at anytime. He doesn't have to wait for a particular date or moment in history. So what is that appearance that comes at anytime in the heart of the

devotee? There's an eternal relationship between the source of consciousness (Krishna) and the consciousness of the living entities. One who constantly remembers that source as one's own essence, also knows that Krishna is the source of everything else. Thus Krishna can make Himself visible anytime because He is essentially hiding there in everything as its essence, *vasudeva sarvam iti*," Sripad Puri Maharaja explained.

"A scientist doesn't just see a carpet, he looks beyond the appearance into the essence of the carpet – this carpet is made of carbon, hydrogen, and so on. In the same way the devotee also sees something essentially miraculous within even in a grain of sand. With the laws of Newton and Einstein and so much knowledge of physics still the scientists cannot make a grain of sand. You can analyze the chemical components of a grain of sand down to the atoms which contain so much energy that you can make an atomic bomb by merely releasing the energy that is already there. Once all that energy is released you can destroy the whole region and maybe the whole world one day, who knows," Sripad Puri Maharaja said. "So don't take that grain of sand so cheaply. It's a marvelous, miraculous thing. Einstein once said 'you can live your life as if nothing is a miracle or you can live life as if everything is a miracle.' You can superficially see everything as inert particles of matter or the spiritual magnificence within everything. *Achinta-shakti*, the inconceivable potency of the Lord is everywhere and that is also His presence, not just His potency since Krishna and His potency are non-different. In this way devotees can understand how Krishna reveals Himself."

"But it is not simply by knowledge that the Supreme Lord may reveal Himself. There are many places in the scripture where this is explained. In the *Mundaka Upanisad* 3.2.3 for instance it is written:

*nayam atma pravacanena labhyo
na medhaya na bahuna srutena
yam evaisha vrinute tena labhyas
tasyaisha atma vivrinute tanum sva*

"The Supreme Lord is not obtained by expert explanations, by vast intelligence, or even by much hearing. He is obtained only by one whom He Himself chooses. To such a person, He manifests His own form."

"Thus only those whom Krishna is pleased with by their service to Guru and vaisnava are given that higher knowledge," Sripad Puri Maharaja continued. "Somehow or other some have causelessly received that grace, that spiritual sense. They can cultivate and

develop that sense further and further. In that way a spiritual community and its world can evolve eventually and that's what we try to encourage and practice ourselves. The best advice is: don't try to see Krishna but act in such a way that Krishna will want to see you."

With this our wonderful Janmasthanmi celebration concluded after *prasadam* 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>Donations via Pay Pal http://bviscs.org/ donation</p>
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