

PRINCETON BHAKTI VEDANTA INSTITUTE

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The Role of Memory in Consciousness

Opening *sadhu sangha*, guest and friend, Ved ji, asked "Why do good people suffer?" In response Sripad Bhakti Madhava Puri Maharaja. PhD, (Sripad Puri Maharaja) replied, "Sri Krishna tells us in *Bhagavad-gita*: *janma-mrtyu-jara-vyadhi* (birth, death, old age, disease) are causes of suffering for everyone good or bad The fact that you are born in the material world is already a problem."

"Why?" guest and friend, Dorothy, asked. "There is pain for the mother, especially at childbirth, as well as pain for the baby in the womb during gestation and birth," Sripad Puri Maharaja responded. "*Mrtyu* (Death) means that no one who is born can stay here forever. We have to die despite the inherent desire to live." He then spoke about *Jara* (old age). "When one gets old, it can be very painful for the body and joints. *Vyadhi* (disease), so many diseases may happen within the body as well as difficulties coming from the environment such as hurricanes, tsunamis, fires, and so on. The material world is thus known as a place of misery and death, *mrtyulok*. Our true spiritual nature is to be immortal, *amrit*" Sripad Puri Maharaja explained. "*Mrit* means death and *amrit* means without death, as well as nectar."



Rasaraja das Prabhu with Sripad Puri Maharaja during kirtan

Referring to his recent meditations on memory, Sripad Puri Maharaja said, "Remembering in Sanskrit is called *smaranam*. Plato (Greek

Philosopher) held the theory that all knowledge must be recollection of ideas that are eternally existing. In other words, if you are trying to understand what virtue means, you would have to already know what virtue is. It is like - if you are looking for something, you have to know what it is before you can find it," Sripad Puri Maharaja said. "In the same way, if you want to know who God is, you have to have some conception of what you are talking about. It seems that everyone has an innate conception of God once they hear about Him, but where does that concept reside? The same is true of virtue and many other conceptions of that nature."

"It's the privilege that a person has about something. You have the ability to talk about Krishna, to talk about religion, God, to feel, and to trust what you are saying," Dorothy said.

"Yes, we may have some piety, merit or *sukriti* that gives us a privilege to come in contact with those things. Plato thought that we have a prior memory of ideas that only have to be recollected or drawn out from us by a teacher, much like a midwife helps a mother give birth to a child," Sripad Puri Maharaja replied. "Nobody wants to accept being imperfect because there is an element within us that seeks perfection. Nobody wants to die even though death comes to all who are born. Even in the army when the soldiers go to fight, they don't go to die. They are thinking 'I want to protect my life. I want the enemy to die.' Unless some persons are very miserable then they might want to die but otherwise people in general don't want to die," Sripad Puri Maharaja explained then asked from where do these instincts come? "The Vedas explain that our original spiritual nature is *sat* (immortal/enduring truth). Why do we want to have perfect

knowledge? Because our spiritual nature is to be full of knowledge (*cit*). And why do we want to be happy (*ananda*)? Again this has to do with our original spiritual nature which is *sat-cit-ananda*.” Sripad Puri Maharaja continued. “We aspire for these things because they are already there in our original nature, the soul’s nature. That is Plato’s idea as far as I understand it. The soul is there, thus we desire these things.”

“Was Plato saying all these things?” Dorothy asked. “Plato did not talk about *sat-cit-ananda*. I am saying these things from Vedic tradition but Plato also had similar ideas about immortality, knowledge and the Good,” Sripad Puri Maharaja responded. “All the historically renowned persons with pure intelligence and pure hearts understood God and other ideas of that nature. Religion is not an invention of this or that person. It’s not the product of the priests or kings. Religion represents the paths that Mankind takes to re-align themselves with their true spiritual nature. So Plato was saying that you cannot get knowledge from ignorance. If you ask someone for a hundred dollars, and they don’t have any money, then they cannot give you that hundred dollars. They may like to give it to you but if they don’t have it they cannot give it, can they? In a similar way you cannot get knowledge from ignorance. Knowledge has to come from that knowledge that is already there. That’s Plato’s idea.”

“The question may arise how did that original knowledge get there?” Sripad Puri Maharaja asked then responded. “Plato could not answer that question because, for him, it never got there but was eternally present. When Aristotle (Greek philosopher, student of Plato) came he said that some knowledge is gained from ‘experience.’ His idea was that we learn different things from perception, and experience comes after you perceived something again and again, and that accumulation of perceptions is called ‘experience.’ Just like when you go to a job interview and they say ‘do you have any experience?’ you don’t say ‘Yes, once I experienced something.’ If you have experience it means you had done it several times, not only one time. So Aristotle’s idea was that from experience comes knowledge.” Sripad Puri Maharaja explained and then asked, “Is there any experience of something eternal?” In response he said, “Well, the present is always with us since the time we were born, and the same self is there throughout our life. At least we might say they are unchanging and undying experiences in our life. So Aristotle could justify eternity. He also conceived of Theos or God through logic as thought thinking itself, as pure thought without matter.”



L to R: Rasaraja das Prabhu with Sripad Puri Maharaja, Dorothy and Ved ji during *sadhu sauga*

“Saint Augustine (Early Christian theologian and philosopher) had the idea that ‘God is both in the memory and beyond memory.’ We can talk about and search for God because once we hear about Him, we remember Him. Then he said ‘but if I look for God in the memory, where is He to be found, where do I look for Him?’ Sripad Puri Maharaja said then asked where is God? In response, Dorothy said, “When I die, I go to heaven and there I might see God.” Pressing for a more direct response, Sripad Puri Maharaja asked, but where is He? “God is up there in heaven,” Dorothy said. “Well, Saint Augustine said God is in the memory but He is also beyond memory, then where is He. Where is that ‘beyond the memory;’” Sripad Puri Maharaja pressed further. “I read in some place that ‘God is in the center of the heart of the person who has faith,” Dorothy said.

“Good. That is what Augustine concluded also. He said, ‘I am trying to find out where is God but the only place I can find Him is in Christ. Christ can remind me of God. I can find God in Christ,’” Sripad Puri Maharaja said. “Krishna says the same thing. He tells us ‘*sādhavo hṛdayaṁ mahyaṁ, sādḥūnāṁ hṛdayaṁ to aham, mad-anyaṭ te na jānanti, nāhaṁ tebhyo manāg api.*’ He is saying the *sadhu, bhaktas* (saints, devotees) are in My heart and I am in the devotee’s heart.’ He then said ‘I know nothing beyond my devotees and My devotees knows nothing beyond Me,” Sripad Puri Maharaja continued. “So where to find Krishna? Krishna replies, ‘I can be found in the heart of My devotees.’ Augustine understood that when he said ‘I can find God in the heart of Christ.’ Christ was the perfect devotee of God and therefore, God can be found there.” *Srimad Bhagavatam*, 9.4.68 confirms this:

*sādhavo hṛdayaṁ mahyaṁ
sādḥūnāṁ hṛdayaṁ to aham
mad-anyaṭ te na jānanti
nāhaṁ tebhyo manāg api*

“The pure devotee is always within the core of My heart, and I am always in the heart of the pure devotee. My devotees do not know anything else but Me, and I do not know anyone else but them.”

“Krishna spoke those things in the *Srimad Bhagavatam* before Plato, Aristotle and Jesus Christ appeared. Both Plato and Aristotle were before Christ came so Plato was just saying in a philosophical way that God must be there in our memory but he did not know about ‘above memory,’” Sripad Puri Maharaja said. “What Krishna says in the *Bhagavad-gita*: *sarvasya caham hr̥di sannivisto, mattah smrtir jnanam apohanam ca. Sarvasya caham hr̥di ‘I am in everyone’s heart,’ ‘from Me comes smaranam (remembrance),’ jnanam (knowledge) and apohanam (forgetfulness).*” This is confirmed in Srila Bhakti Raksaka Sridhara Maharaja’s *Bhagavad Gita - The Hidden Treasure of the Sweet Absolute*: 15.15:

*sarvasya caham hr̥di sannivisto
mattah smrtir jnanam apohanam ca
vedais ca sarvair aham eva vedyo
vedanta-krd̥ veda-vid eva caham*

“I am situated {as the Supersoul} within the heart of all souls, and from Me arises the soul’s remembrance, knowledge, and forgetfulness {according to his actions}. I alone am the Sweet Absolute to be known through all the *Vedas*. I am the revealer of the *Vedānta*—*Vedavyāsa*, and I am the knower of the *Vedas*.”

“Krishna says there that ‘I am the source of memory’ therefore, He’s above memory. This is another interpretation. We cannot get something from nothing, so the source of all memory is from Krishna because it’s already there in Him. Memory is part of Him, thus Krishna is in our memory but He’s also above it,” Sripad Puri Maharaja explained. To further elucidate Krishna in and above our memory, he said, “Like a pizza pie. The pizza is in the slice and the slice is in the pie but the pie includes the slice, so God is in each individual and we are also in God.”

“This is what I am thinking: God is not material, or human. God created the world and He decided to send some followers as human-beings like Christ, Krishna, Allah, Buddha. So He (God) decided those people to be human so we can believe more about God. I believe that God made these followers to make us believers,” Dorothy said then asked, “Is that true?” “He is formless. He has no form. You will not be able to see Him. You have to feel him in your heart,” Ved ji responded.

“When God incarnates or comes to this world, He appears in human form, but He is not merely human. He is always God. Also Krishna has no material form but that does not mean He is ultimately formless. In the *Brahma-samhita* Krishna is described as *sat-chit-ananda- vighraha*. His form is *sat-cit-ananda*. Krishna is also described as having infinite forms (*ananta-rupa*),” Sripad Puri Maharaja said then asked, “When Arjuna asked Krishna to allow him to see His transcendental form what did He show Arjuna?” In response, he said, “First He told Arjuna that He will

give him transcendental eyes or vision, then He showed him His form with limitless hands, mouths, heads, arms, and so on - right? In other words He appeared in His infinite forms or *ananta-rupa*.”

But we cannot see Him,” Ved ji continued. “Ordinarily, but Arjuna saw Him because he was given special dispensation by Krishna. Otherwise one cannot see Krishna with materially conditioned eyes. We have to see Him with our hearts –our faith and love. If Krishna wants to show Himself to anyone they can see Him. Why not? He is infinite. If He is restricted in some way then He is not God, He is not infinite. He can do whatever He wants. He can show or hide Himself as He desires,” Sripad Puri Maharaja responded.

From the *Brahma-samhita* we learn that Krishna is “*advaitam acyutam anadim ananta-rupam*.” *Advaitam* means there’s only one God even though He has unlimited forms. *Acyutam* means unconquerable. He cannot be conquered by anyone except by His devotees’ love. *Anadim* means He does not have a beginning or an end. *Ananta-rupam* means He has an unlimited number of forms. That is what we mean by God, not that He does not have a form.” This is confirmed in the *Brahma-Samhita*: 5.33:

*advaitam acyutam anadim ananta-rupam
adyam purana-purusam nava-yauvanam ca
vedesu durllabham adurllabham atma-bhaktau
govindam adi-purusam tam aham bhajami.*

“I worship the Supreme Personality of Godhead, Govinda [Krsna], who is the original person—absolute, infallible, without beginning, although expanded into unlimited forms, still the same original, the oldest, and the person always appearing as a fresh youth. Such eternal, blissful, all-knowing forms of the Lord are usually understood by the best Vedic scholars, but they are always manifest to pure, unalloyed devotees.”

Sripad Puri Maharaja continued, “Lord Brahma said in the *Brahma-samhita* 5.38 ‘*premanjana-cchurita-bhakti-vilocanena*’ – when the heart of a devotee (*bhakta*) is imbued with divine love (*prema*) their eyes would be able to see Krishna. ‘*Yam syamasundaram acintya-guna-svarupam*’ He (Lord Brahma) is saying that ‘although Lord Krishna is inconceivable (*acintya*), He can still be seen within the heart of His devotees as the beautiful Syamasundar (Krishna).” *Brahma-samhita*: 5.38 confirms this:

*premanjana-cchurita-bhakti-vilocanena
santah sadaiva hr̥dayesu vilokayanti
yam syamasundaram acintya-guna-svarupam
govindam adi-purusam tam aham bhajami*

“I worship the primeval Lord, Govinda, who is always seen by the devotee whose eyes are anointed with the pulp of love. He is seen in His eternal form of Syamasundara situated within the heart of the devotee.”

Dorothy then said, "I think he (Ved ji) is correct about his feelings. I always feel He (Krishna) is around me. When I go outside of my home, I ask Him to bless me. In some way I feel the guarding hands in my walk. I don't see Them in person but I feel Them (Christ and Krishna) with me, Right now I feel Them here because I am in this conversation, in some way praising God and talking about Him." Ved ji said, "Sometimes people feel God but they do not see God. Krishna was there in Vrindavan, Mathura, so many places but the people did not feel He was God. They see Him as an ordinary boy,"

"This may be true, but the proper *Bhagavat* conception is also necessary," Sripad Puri Maharaja said, and then brought the discussion back full circle. "We were talking about the significance of memory, from Plato to Saint Augustine and also to Krishna. Scientists and others don't really have a good understanding about the importance or meaning of memory and how it affects us. Memory has a fundamental influence in what we call consciousness. Generally when people speak about consciousness they don't know how it is related to memory. Memory involves thought in a special way, as objectively existing in us. Without memory we would not have the sense of continuity of 'self' that consciousness requires. It is memory that allows us to understand things, without which we would just have stimuli, perceptions, blind sensations without their unifying concepts. Some people may only want different stimulations - they don't want to think or put the pieces together. They want to have one experience after another, mere sense gratification, and that is sufficient, for them," Sripad Puri Maharaja continued. "But that is more like animal life. For the human form of life, however, the cultivation of memory is very important for understanding God as the source, unity or totality of everything."

"While speaking of memory we must not forget forgetfulness. Without forgetfulness how will it ever be possible to forgive and forget. So we should mention that a balance of memory and forgetfulness is necessary for knowledge and proper adjustment in life."



Prabhus: Nila Madhava das, Rasaraja das with Sripad Puri Maharaja, Dorothy and Ved ji

"What is the Vedic way of training your memory?" Sripad Puri Maharaja asked then said, "In the ancient days people use to practice developing good memory. It was a very important part of their culture. They did not have books, computers, smartphones, or all these

electronic devices at that time that we are familiar with. Actually memory is being neglected more and more as time goes on because as soon as books became widely available, memory became secondary to the written word since we can always go to a book for reference. With the dawn of computers and so forth which store information, if you do not remember something, the first thing we do is look it up on Google, but that is information not knowledge," Sripad Puri Maharaja continued. "Knowledge requires creating a thread of different stimuli, pieces of evidence, and experiences which requires memory. If we don't have that memory then those different pieces won't be there to string together. Gradually memory seems to be waning as people become more interested in collecting mere data that is statistically analyzed on computers or in gathering experiences. On the other hand Vedic culture considers memory to be very important and fundamental for proper intelligence and understanding our spiritual nature."

"I remember when I was in high school we had to use our brain to remember everything. Now I see my grandchildren, everywhere they go, they use electronic toys and computers for all the answers. The memory doesn't work anymore. I am so surprised," Dorothy said. "Our memory is totally lost," Ved ji said.

"This is what is happening as *Kali yuga* (age of darkness and ignorance) progresses. Memory will be finished and only what we see with our eyes or what is happening immediately for our senses will be all that's important. To get enough sense experience, whether I have to go to the movie theaters, to different restaurants or fast food places, concerts, sports events - whatever way they can enjoy as many experiences as possible, so they don't have to think," Sripad Puri Maharaja said then asked what is Vedic culture? In response he said, "Vedic culture is about cultivating *smaranam* (remembrance). How does Vedic culture cultivate *smaranam*? The recommended process is *sravanam kirtanam visnoh smaranam*.. *Sravanam* means hearing, *kirtanam* means speaking, singing, or chanting about Krishna. Reading the *sastras* (scriptures), delivering and hearing discourses as we are doing here, talking about Krishna (*Hari katha*) are all processes by which we can develop *visnoh smaranam* (remembrance of Krishna). To counteract the damaging influence of Kali it is recommended in the scriptures that we should engage in *sankirtana*, congregational chanting and hearing. If people can at least hear the chanting of the Mahamantra (*Hare Krishna, Hare Krishna, Krishna Krishna, Hare Hare / Hare Rama, Hare Rama, Rama Rama, Hare Hare*), they can be inspired to develop their remembrance of Krishna . By distributing devotional literature they can read and that is also hearing. Once they begin talking about it then it becomes chanting. In this way memory can be cultivated."

"After we can remember Krishna, which we call Krishna consciousness, what happens next? Is that the end of all of this?" Sripad Puri Maharaja

asked. "We have to keep praising Him," Dorothy said.

"Yes, but is remembering the same as being in contact with Krishna?" Sripad Puri Maharaja asked further. "*Pada-sevanam*," Kushum devi said. "Yes, serving, and not only serving Krishna but serving His servants. *Pada-sevanam* means serving the lotus feet of those who serve *guru* (spiritual teacher) and *vaisnavs* (the humble worshippers of Lord Vishnu). By utilizing our body, mind, heart, words, intelligence, our soul in the service of Guru and Krishna, our whole being comes in touch with Him through loving service. Krishna said, 'I can be known directly by your loving service to Me.' That is *saranagati* (complete surrender)." Sridhara Maharaja's *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."

"Can I say I am serving Krishna at this moment by listening to the *guru*?" Dorothy asked. "Yes, by using our tongue, ears, mind, memory, in relation to Krishna it is all service and through such service you come in touch with Him," Sripad Puri Maharaja responded. "Krishna said 'my devotees knows nothing but Me and I know nothing but My devotees,' We are all looking for Him, but where can we find Him? Krishna said, 'I can be found in the hearts of My devotees.' If we cannot see Krishna there, we can go to heaven looking for Him but we will not find Him there either. You will find Him where His Holy Names and *lila* (pastimes) are being sung by His devotees."

Sripad Puri Maharaja continued, "In the Christian religion they have Christ as the mediator, so they don't look for God in heaven; they look for God in the heart of Christ. In the Vedic tradition, we don't look for Krishna in Vrindavan, we look for Krishna in Guru, as the mediator. Whoever we accept as *guru*, we find God there, directing us. '*ācāryaṁ māṁ vijānīyān*' *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* 11.17 confirms this.

*ācāryaṁ māṁ vijānīyān
navamanyeta 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."

"Our purpose is to serve *guru* and in that way we can properly serve Krishna. We don't go directly to serve Krishna. We approach in a

humble way, through Krishna's servant. We don't ignore His energy, *Shakti* (Srimati Radharani). We try to follow the path of Radha-dasya (loving service mood). We direct our service to that serving energy that is most dedicated to Him, His service energy (Srimati Radharani)," Sripad Puri Maharaja concluded.

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

All Glories to Sri Guru and Sri Sri Gauranga
Sri Bhakti Nirmal Acharya Maharaja ki jai
Sripad Bhakti Madhava Puri Maharaj ki jai

Your humble servant, Kushum Devi Dasi (New York)		Donations via PayPal may be sent to seva@bviscs.org
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