



# PRINCETON BHAKTI VEDANTA INSTITUTE

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

Cell: (123) 456 7891 |

## The Nine Processes of Bhakti

Celebrating the last day of the month of Damodar, Nila Madhava Prabhu on *mdanga*, accompanied by Rasaraja das Prabhu and Sripad Puri Maharaja on *kartals* began our weekly Harrinam kirtan. The devotees offered lamps to Sri Damodar while Sripad Puri Maharaja sang the *Sri Damodarastakam*, followed by the devotees reading the English translation.



Nilā Madhava das Prabhu with Sripad Puri Maharaja, Amy, Zhanna and Rasaraja das Prabhu

One of the verses we read in the *Sri Damodarastakam* [verse 4] mentioned the nine processes of *bhakti*. Sripad Puri Maharaja began explaining them for us.

“There are eighteen *Puranas* (ancient texts) in the Vedic culture and one hundred and eight *Upanishads* as well as the four *Vedas*. In the *Puranas*, six are for those in the mode of goodness, six are for those in the mode of passion, and the other six are for those who are in the mode of ignorance. Everyone is included under the three modes of material nature, so the *Puranas* are written with the understanding that there is not ‘one size that fits all’ but there are ‘different *slokas* for different folks,” Sripad Bhakti Madhava Puri Maharaja, PhD, (Sripad Puri Maharaja) said as he opened sanga at the Bhakti Vedanta Institute (BVI) in Princeton. “The *Srimad Bhagavatam*, also known as the *Bhagavat Purana* is written for those in the *suddha sattva* (mode of pure goodness) and there we find the mention of Bhakta Prahlad Maharaj. He is considered as a *suddha bhakta* (pure devotee). So many people have devotion but with pure devotion, not tinged with anything else, such as desire for some

result from one’s work, desire to be honored or glorified as a devotee, or to get any benefit in this world - none of those things are present in the mind or heart of a pure devotee. Pure devotion means total surrender (*sharanagati*) and dedication of one’s body, mind and words to Krishna. From Prahlad Maharaj the nine processes of *bhakti* were described in the *Srimad Bhagavatam*: 7.5.23-24 as follows:

*śrī-prahlāda uvāca*  
*śravaṇaṁ kīrtanaṁ viṣṇoḥ*  
*smaraṇaṁ pāda-sevanam*  
*arcanaṁ vandanam dāsyam*  
*sakhyam ātma-nivedanam*  
*iti pumsārpitā viṣṇau*  
*bhaktiś cen nava-lakṣaṇā*  
*kriyeta bhagavaty addhā*  
*tan manye ’dhītam uttamam*

“Prahāda Mahārāja said: Hearing and chanting about the transcendental holy name, form, qualities, paraphernalia and pastimes of Lord Viṣṇu, remembering them, serving the lotus feet of the Lord, offering the Lord respectful worship with sixteen types of paraphernalia, offering prayers to the Lord, becoming His servant, considering the Lord one’s best friend, and surrendering everything unto Him (in other words, serving Him with the body, mind and words) — these nine processes are accepted as pure devotional service. One who has dedicated his life to the service of Krishna through these nine methods should be understood to be the most learned person, for he has acquired complete knowledge.”



Nilā Madhava Prabhu with Sripad Puri Maharaja, Amy and Zhanna

“*Sravanam* means hearing. Just hearing about Krishna is a process of service because our ears can be used for so many different things but if instead of all those other things we use that hearing only for *Krishna katha* then it’s called dedication. It’s a devotional activity when you attentively listen and want to learn about Krishna with keen interest. That is part of *bhakti, sravanam*. Unless we hear about Krishna, we won’t know about Him,” Sripad Puri Maharaja explained. “Once you hear about Krishna, then you can chant His name, talk about Him, tell others about His pastimes, and discuss the deeper topics of His philosophy. That is *kirtanam*, which means speaking, singing, or chanting the Holy Names and topics concerning Krishna. You may read the *sastras* (scriptures) or hear discourses like we are doing here, talking about Krishna (*Hari katha*), this is all part of hearing and chanting. Between utilizing the ear and the tongue in this way comes *visnoh smaranam* (remembrance of Krishna/Vishnu). Between chanting and hearing comes remembering, thus by hearing and chanting about Krishna, we become Krishna conscious. What we are forgetting most in this world is Krishna. The material world is meant for distracting us from Krishna and causing us to forget Him unless one is a devotee, then everything comes to remind one of Krishna. By Krishna’s grace, one who has that knowledge, that conception, the consciousness, or remembrance of Krishna, then he can see Krishna in everything, even in a blade of grass.”

“*Pada-sevanam* means to serve the lotus feet, not only serving Krishna but serving His servants. To remember Krishna, to be Krishna conscious is one thing, but to serve Krishna’s devotees is even more satisfying to Krishna than His direct service. This is because Krishna cannot serve His devotees since they only want to serve Him and won’t accept service from Him. *Pada-sevanam* means serving the lotus feet of those who serve *guru* (spiritual teacher) and *vaisnavs* (worshippers of Lord Vishnu). By using our body, mind, heart, words, intelligence, our *atma* or soul and in the service of Krishna, we come in touch with Him indirectly through that service,” Sripad Puri Maharaja continued.

“Raghunath das Goswami considered himself *dasudasanudas* – the servant of the servant of the servant of His Lord. To be even remotely connected with Krishna - anything is better than living a wasteful life oblivious of one’s sacred connection to Divinity. Thus he is known as the *prayojan acharya*, the teacher of our highest engagement, *Radha dasya*, the service to the Supreme Servitor Godhead, Srimati Radharani. To live a life like an animal without such higher connection is sinful,” Sripad Puri Maharaja said then asked why it is sinful. In response, he said, “There’s no real joy in that kind of life. The joy that one has in the life of Krishna consciousness is so superior that anything else is considered a sin, a waste of your energy. To miss that kind of *ananda* (bliss) is a sinful life. Your birthright is to be *amritasya putram*, sons of nectar.”

“*Arcanam* means worshiping the Lord by offering incense, ghee lamp before images of the Lord and *gurudev*. *Vandanam* means praying to the Lord. These are all parts of *bhakti* (devotion). *Vandanam* doesn’t mean praying ‘Dear Lord give me this, give me that,’ no, that is not praying.

Praying means to praise the Lord,” Sripad Puri Maharaja continued. The next is *dasyam*, which means having the mood that ‘I am the servant of God and His devotees. I have no independence, no purpose or function other than to be the servant of the servant of Krishna. I exist for His purposes, otherwise why would I be here?’”



Nil Madhava Prabhu with Sripad Puri Maharaja, Amy, Zhanna, and Sobha

“Sanatan Goswami asked Mahaprabhu, ‘Who am I’ [*ke ami* in Bengali]. Mahaprabhu<sup>[2]</sup> answered ‘*jivera 'svarupa' haya, kr̥ṣṇera 'nitya-dāsa.*’ Your *svapur* means your eternal form which is not created by anything other than oneself as servant of Krishna. Your true self is not the fleeting body that is constantly changing but your permanent form (*svapur*) is that of an eternal servant of Krishna. This is not a form that is not imposed upon us, it is ‘us’ - who we really are. To realize that, to live in that realization, to adapt to the reality of who we are, that’s *dasyam*. We are not independent, we are dependent or servants of that for which we exist as identical to yet other than ourselves,” Sripad Puri Maharaja said. *Sri Chaitanya Charitamrita* 20.108-10 confirms this:

*jivera 'svarupa' haya — kr̥ṣṇera 'nitya-dāsa'*  
*kr̥ṣṇera 'taṭasthā-śakti' 'bhedābheda-prakāśa'*  
*sūryāmśa-kiraṇa, yaiche agni-jvālā-caya*  
*svābhāvika kr̥ṣṇera tina-prakāra 'śakti' haya*

“It is the living entity’s constitutional position to be an eternal servant of Kṛṣṇa because he is the marginal energy of Kṛṣṇa and a manifestation simultaneously one with and different from the Lord, like a molecular particle of sunshine or fire. Kṛṣṇa has three varieties of energy.”



Ralph, Nil Madhava das and Rasaraja das during question and answers

“Even our ability to know is not independent. Without *sastra* (scriptures) we would not know what is what. Thus Veda [know, knowledge] is given as the source of perfect knowledge because it is revealed word of God. Of course it is revealed to *sadhu*, so without *sadhu* we would not have proper knowledge. All that a finite conditioned soul know is false knowledge – just as today they speak of ‘false news.’ What is presented in this world of conditioned existence in the name of knowledge or news is all false. That which is called false refers to whatever is not connected with the truth,” Sripad Puri Maharaja said then asked what is the truth? In response, he said, “Certainly God Who is perfect and the source of everything is the self- knowing absolute truth. In philosophy, God or the Absolute Truth refers to the Concept that is identical

with its Reality. In the material world, due to our finite limitations, we are only subject to misconception, But God, being self-knowing, His revelation of Himself to Himself is for us a revelation of Himself and we can know what is the truth if we are in His good graces, or not diverted to the non-godly plane of material pursuits.”

Sripad Puri Maharaja continued, “Under illusion we think ourselves to be independent but we are not. Without air we could not breathe, without light, even with 20/20 vision, we could not see. Without the electric company we would not have any light in our house. We depend on the garbage man collecting the garbage every week. Without your employer you would not get paid. Even if you are self-employed, you depend on your customers for your income. In this way, if we think carefully we find we are dependent, not independent. Still we think we are independent, but it’s a mistake or false knowledge of our actual position. Being dependent means we must serve in this world whether or not if we believe in God. Those who are devotees, recognizing their true nature, direct their serving capacity to Krishna and that is called *bhakti*. Linking one’s life in devotional service to Krishna and His devotees is the process of yoga called *bhakti yoga*. This is *dasyam*, using our serving capacity to please Krishna.”

“Next, *Sakhyam* means to become a friend to the Lord. This might seem at first to be somewhat arrogant. How can a mere servant feel like a friend to God? So to try to understand this properly is difficult. Only one who has surrendered to Krishna and given up all material conceptions of life may have the special grant from above to realize the more intimate feelings between the Lord and His devotee. We cannot artificially create this relationship out of imagination. Krishna is not an imaginary friend but the most real of all realities. It is even possible that one may not feel subordinate to Krishna but in a more reciprocal friendship,” Sripad Puri Maharaja explained. “When one is qualified to actually meet Krishna as a friend, by His will, we will know it is real and not mere imagination.”

“*Atma-nivedanam* means to give one self completely to Krishna. In that stage the devotees don’t know anything but Krishna and Krishna doesn’t know anything but His devotees. In the *Srimad Bhagavatam*: 9.4.68 Krishna says, *sādhavo hṛdayaṁ mahyaṁ, sādḥūnāṁ hṛdayaṁ tv aham* – ‘the devotees are in the core of My heart and I am in the heart of the devotees.’” This kind of identity in difference Mahaprabhu called the principle of *achinta beda abeda tattva* (inconceivable oneness and difference). It is like this: we are in this world, we are a part of this world but at the same time what is this world?” Sripad Puri Maharaja asked then responded, “Because the world is only what I know it to be, the content of my consciousness, in this sense the world is in me. Thus I am in the world but at the same time the world is also in me, in my idea of the world. Thus Krishna says ‘you are in Me and I am in you.’ This is *Atma-nivedanam*, an imminent and transcendent relationship of God and His devotees. Imminent means within that which exists for Himself and transcendent means in His own abode, in His own self. He is in His own self and is in everything as well. There cannot be two absolutes. Krishna is the absolute truth. Truth means ‘what is’ and the ultimate truth is Krishna. Just as Being belongs to

everything that is, so Krishna is in everything as the Essence of all Being. Krishna says ‘*aham sarvasya prabhavo* – I am the source of everything. Everything is coming from Me. I am the cause of all causes *sarva karana karanam*. You are not independent of Me and I am in reciprocal relation with you - *ye yataḥ mam prapadyante tams tathaiva bhajamy aham*,” Sripad Puri Maharaja explained. “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, *rāga-marga*, and adore Me forever.”

“*Sravanam. Kirtanam. visnoh smaranam. pada-sevanam. Arcanam. Vandanam. Dasyam. Sakhyam. atma-nivedanam*” are the nine processes of *bhakti*. *Bhakti* means all these things,” Sripad Puri Maharaja concluded.



Sripad Puri Maharaja Rasaraja das Prabhu with guests: Amy and Zhanna

“It is like there are two realities at the same time - the absolute and the relative, so everything in this world is about relative because everything has a beginning and an end and is not complete, but everything about *bhakti-yoga* is absolute,” Rasaraja das Prabhu commented.

“Yes, I think that’s correct. An early Greek philosopher named Democratus, famous for his theory of atomism, believed that by convention we name something sweet or sour, but ultimately there are only atoms and void. In the same way we can’t say how long a meter actually is yet everyone may agree to accept a standard definition. But such a measurement is only relative or judged according to the accepted convention,” Sripad Puri Maharaja responded then said, “But what the absolute measure of length is, they don’t know. They can only adopt some convention, then it becomes relative to that accepted standard. So in a simple way we can say that relative means what is man-made and absolute refers to what God made.”

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