



PRINCETON BHAKTI VEDANTA INSTITUTE

REPORT - NOVEMBER 5, 2016

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Unity of Science and Religion: Discussion with Dr. Kitagawa

As we continued our celebration of *Kartik* (*Damodar Maas* - the holiest month in the Vaishnava lunar calendar), we also celebrate *Sri Govardhan Puja*.^[1] For the month of *Damodar* we offer lamps (*deep dan*) to Lord Damodar (childhood form of Sri Krishna), while chanting the

Damodarastakam,^[2]” Sripad Bhakti Madhava Puri Maharaja, Ph.D. (Sripad Puri Maharaja) explained to his special guest, Dr. Audrey Kitagawa, who served as advisor to religious and other humanitarian organizations of the United Nations (UN) and is a member of several international organizations. She recently returned from an international conference on science and religion in Chennai, India, which included our Sripad Bhakti Vijnana Muni Maharaja, Ph.D. and Sripad Bhakti Niskam Shanta Maharaja, Ph.D.

“*Kartik* is the month of Damodar when we meditate on the pastimes of Krishna with His Mother Yasoda” Sripad Puri Maharaja explained. “We offer lamps (*deepam*) which are a symbol of service in this special month which is very dear to the Lord and brings many blessings to the devotees who participate in these expressions of devotion. We also offer a daily prayer, *Sri Damodarastakam*, which glorifies the pastimes of the Lord during this month.”

Sripad Puri Maharaja with kartals opened our weekly *sadhu sangha* by chanting *Sri Damodarastakam*¹ - ‘*namāmiśvaram sac-cid-*

ānanda-rūpam/ lasat-kundalam □ gokule bhrājamanam.’ This prayer describes the early childhood pastime of the Supreme Personality of Godhead Sri Krishna, running from His Mother, Yasoda when she tried to punish Him for stealing butter from the *gopis*, the cowherd women of Vrindavan. During this special month of *Kartik*, devotees around the world chant these eight verses daily. Each verse describes various exceptional qualities and features of Sri Krishna’s childhood pastimes. The English translations were then read by each of the devotees in turn.



Dr. Kitagawa, Rasaraja das Prabhu, Sripad Puri Maharaja with Dorothy and Zhana

Bridging the connection between science and religion, Sripad Puri Maharaja said, “Sripad Shanta Maharaja has put together a list of about 40,000 scientists in the field of consciousness studies and other areas, contributing to several on-going conversations on the internet on the topic of consciousness. One of the main categories missing in scientific discussions is

what G. W. F. Hegel (German philosopher) around the 1800's called 'being for self.' Hegel said 'being for self' is the logical category of being underlying consciousness. There's 'being' and as well as 'being for self,'" Sripad Puri Maharaja said. "Knowledge involves: (1) the object known, (2) knowledge of the object, (3) the knower."

"The known object has its own being by itself, while the being of the object for consciousness is called knowledge of the object. What the object is for consciousness, we call knowledge and that which knowledge is for the knower. The self (*atman*) is thus connected with the object through his knowledge of it," Sripad Puri Maharaja continued. "The study of the known is called ontology. The study of knowledge is called epistemology and the study of the knower is called theology. All three of these are interconnected but science only deals with the known. Science does not generally recognize that knowledge is involved in what is known. The known is what we have some knowledge about but science neglects the role of the scientist's knowledge - the being for consciousness of the object. The relation of these three aspects is something the philosophers have been discussing in recent times since Kant (Immanuel Kant, a German philosopher who is considered a central figure of modern philosophy). The contribution of the subject, the knower, is essential to understanding the unity of the object properly. It is not that the object can be understood on its own. There's a vital contribution from the subject in determining what the object is. A result of the failure to study his philosophical arguments in this regard has led to much confusion in the development of quantum theory concerning the role of consciousness."

"The other consideration of 'being-for' that is neglected by modern science is the purpose, or that-for-the-sake-of-which an object exists. This is interpreted as final cause in Aristotle's philosophy. However Aristotle's original term *aitia* refers more to explanation than cause. To explain a thing properly requires knowing that-for-the-sake-of-which it exists. The famous example he gave is of a hand. Without knowing the relation of the hand to the human body we cannot properly describe it as merely a five limbed object."

"Why do you think this neglect has taken place?" Dr. Kitagawa asked. "It's a long story but we can say it begins with a philosopher-scientist named Francis Bacon, who is considered the father of scientific empiricism. He proposed that science should be concerned with two of the four factors that were given originally by Aristotle for properly explaining things," Sripad Puri Maharaja replied. "Aristotle enumerated four aspects of every cause - the material, efficient, formal and the final cause. For example, the material cause may be a lump of clay, the efficient cause is the potter's hands molding the clay, the formal cause is the design or plan by which the potter directs his actions and the final cause is the adequacy of the finished product to its idea. Bacon considered only two things that science has to be concerned with: the material and the efficient cause, nothing else. The material we are working with and what causes that material to change. He left out of consideration the formal and final causes. Thus modern science has inherited that type of explanation in terms of material and efficient causation."

"What is the defect when you do something like that?" Sripad Puri Maharaja asked then responded, "The best way to understand this is with the analogy of the blind men and the elephant. There were several blind men and an elephant. They could not see and did not know there was an elephant before them. One touched the leg and said 'oh, this is like a tree stump,' another touched the tail and said 'oh, this is a rope,' the third touched the trunk and said, 'this is like a snake,' and another touched the ear and said 'this is like a fan.' Because they did not know the whole their knowledge of the parts was incomplete and consequently improperly understood. Without understanding its purpose or relation with the whole a leg of an elephant could be misconceived as a tree stump," Sripad Puri Maharaja said. "Without knowledge of that-for-the-sake-of-which a thing exists, it can take on a completely different significance altogether. So by studying the different finite aspects of the world without understanding their overall purpose, we cannot properly understand anything. We don't have the full information we need to properly explain things. So, this 'being for' or understanding the purpose of life, has become something many people no longer ask anymore. They think that the purpose of life is simply to enjoy the senses."

Everything is finished at the time of death. That's it!" Sripad Puri Maharaja said. "And that whole mode of thinking can trace its origin in modern science."



Nitai das with Matajis: Sringara & Bakula, Prabhus: Surottama & Rasaraja das

"Modernity refers to the age of reason or enlightenment philosophy, which was first clearly formulated by Rene Descartes (1596-1650). Here we first find consciousness (*res cogitans*) or subjectivity being distinguished from matter (*res extensus*) or objectivity. This gave rise to the concept of the duality of the subject and object," Sripad Puri Maharaja continued then asked what cognition is? What does 'knowing' mean? He then responded, "Raising what is externally objective into our own subjectivity. What we understand as subjective is an internal image (picture) or representation of what is outwardly present in the world. In philosophy this subjective representation of phenomena is called perception. A perception is something like a pre-conception, or something that comes before forming a proper conception or comprehension of an object. Thus we can distinguish three stages present in consciousness: (sensuous) apprehension, perception, and comprehension."

"Each form (stage, level, Gestalt) of consciousness can thus be distinguished from the others by means of its particular function. The first level of consciousness is the senses or sensuousness, also called sentience. Specifically that which can feel or experience is sentient. To claim that the Absolute is sentient being or sentient substance is to recognize its ability to feel and experience. This completely revolutionizes the presupposition of modern science that reality is ultimately impersonal, insentient substance or matter. The materialized conception of the universe finds it impossible to explain how sentience or life came from insentient mat-

ter. If life or sentience is primordial, however, the hard problem that materialism faces is immediately resolved. This idea correlates with our natural experience that life always comes from previous life. How the material concept of a rock is formed, for instance, seems much more reasonable than how a rock could form a concept of itself using a scientist for its own service. George Wald and Niels Bohr actually realized this same preposterous conclusion about physicists."

"So the immediate apprehension of an object by the senses may be considered a first level of consciousness found even in lower forms of life such as microbes, plants and insects who may not have the developed senses of a man or animal but nonetheless do exhibit behavior indicative of sentience or feeling."

"The next level of consciousness is the perception or the pre-conceptual formation of internal representations, images, or pictures. These may also be considered as immediate intuitions of the internal sense, but because representations are reflected mirror images of external objects they are considered the mediating means between apprehension (the first level of consciousness) and comprehension *the third level of consciousness) or the concept of the representation that is formed by thought. It is within the hierarchy of these three initial levels that we can recognize the beginning of what is called the subjective evolution of consciousness. "

"Kant took this simplified and naïve schema of the stages of cognition and subjected it to his method of internal critique – thinking about, analyzing and systematizing the internal processes of the mind. He recognized that there are certain inherent categories of the mind that are applied to the objects that are intuited by the senses. In other words, the objects of the senses do not just reflect themselves in the mind like an internal mirror and then we form concepts of them. Rather the mind has to apply certain judgements to the objects that the senses apprehend in order to determine them as unities, differences, relations, and so on. The senses understood as mere passive sensors or receivers do not determine, for example, something as simple as object A is 'next to' object B. In other words, none of the passive senses have the capacity to determine 'next to.' This is an act of comparison or judgement about what the senses

apprehend in a direct, intuitive, simple, immediate or unmediated way. This means that the mind contributes in a very important way to what the senses apprehend. The naive realists (people in general including most scientists) have no idea of this involvement of mind in their perception of the world.”

“Kant enumerated twelve categories of judgment that were actually first given by the amazing intellect of Aristotle about two thousand years before him. These are all necessary in explaining our cognition or knowledge of the varieties of phenomenal experience, mathematics, science, and so on. In order to understand this more clearly, I like to give the example of robotics, in which a robot is equipped with a photoelectric tube as a sensor – analogous to the eyes that see things. When the sensor detects a photon bouncing off an object the photoelectric cell generates an electric current. In order for the robot to respond to that current it has to be passed to a computer that is programmed to send an electrical signal to a servomotor that can move the robot away from or towards the object. In the same way our senses send signals to the brain but the mind has to determine how to interpret those signals as to the nature of the object and one’s behavior toward it.”

“Modern science has pretty much ignored all this internal processing in its study of the objects of the world. Despite its successes this is clearly a mistake that neglects the wealth of knowledge within us. The ancient *Samkhya* philosophy of India recognized the importance of the internal or subtle processes of cognition in explaining the phenomenal world,” Sripad Puri Maharaja continued. Besides the *indriyas* (senses) there’s the *manas* (mind), the *buddhi* (intellect) and the *ahankar* (ego, or unity of apprehension as Kant called it). There is also the *citta* (memory) which is very important. These are part of the subtle reality that is absolutely essential if we want to properly explain our knowledge of things .

“From a particular subjective perspective the totality of experiences in life/consciousness are integrated by a unity called ego. This, however,



During *sadhu-sanga*: Nitai das, Matajis: Sringara, Bakula, Prabhus: Surottama das, Rasaraja das (hidden behind), Dr. Kitagawa

is considered false ego because it fails to account for its integrity with the universal whole of reality that informs its particularity. In other words, the ego does not only include its being for itself, it is also that which has being for that which is other than itself. By dividing itself as ego from the non-ego or world, as self and not-self, it creates a subjective duality that does not exist from the perspective of the whole as an organic unity. Thus it is called false ego, although the being for self of the particular does exist as the moment of particularity of the universal whole.”

“There is another way to understand this from the analogy of the elephant and blind men. The misconception of the leg of an elephant as a tree stump arises from the failure to understand the particular object of immediate experience in relation to the whole. Thus the false conclusion that it is a tree stump is due to the failure of accounting for its being-for that which is other than itself – in other words ‘that-for-the-sake-of-which’ it exists, i.e. its final purpose or end. Such truncated or finite understanding of objects as isolated on their own must lead to this kind of false knowledge.”

“Until we understand what we are for, what the purpose of life is then the “I,” the self, the ego, is misconceived as an isolated self, an individualized form centered upon itself. It is called false ego because it is understood only in its being for itself and not in its context as being for other, in its relationship to the Organic Whole, God, Spirit, the Absolute, the ultimate truth, in terms of which it becomes a real knowledge of self. Our real identity is as part of the Whole. We are part of something greater than ourselves beyond our localized existence. Real education is meant to teach this.”

“When we say ‘we’ I immediately take myself and expand it to become a part of something wider than myself. ‘I’ and ‘we’ are not the same thing but I am part of the ‘we’ and the ‘we’ makes up the content of ‘I.’ I am included there when I say “we.” I don’t feel that it is something totally different from me when I say ‘we,’” Sri-pad Puri Maharaja continued. “When Jesus gave the Lord’s prayer, He began with ‘Our Father. ‘not ‘My Father.’ The *Declaration of Independence* begins with ‘We the people.’ It is very important to understand the distinction and relationship between the universal ‘We’ and the particular ‘I.’ There’s a numerical difference yet an identity at the same time. In set theory it would be like the difference between a member of a set and the set itself. At the same time from the vantage point of Life, ‘We’ includes only human beings, but there are also animals, plants and even the Earth itself that are an essential and inseparable part of Life. They are all truths of that reality we are participants in. The highest conception of that totality is what we call God or for the Vaishnava’s, Krishna. God is not nameless or impersonal. He has millions of names. Something so great and inclusive - why should we restrict God? The infinite is all inclusive with many Names and innumerable qualities.”



Conversation with Dr. Kitagawa, Ralph, Ras-
araja das Prabhu and Sripad Puri Maharaja

“*Bhakti yoga* is the yoga of the heart - the yoga of devotion,” Sripad Puri Maharaja said after referencing the forth verse of *Sri Damodarastakam*, where the nine processes of *bhakti*, (devotion/ dedication) are mentioned. Sripad Puri Maharaja explained, “The boon that they offer is de-centering the self.” They are *sraavanam* (hearing about the Lord) *kīrtanam* (speaking about or chanting the Lord’s name), *vishnu smaranam* (remembering Vishnu/Krishna),

pāda-sevanam (humble service at the feet of the Lord and His servitors), *arcanam* (worshipping the divine form of the Lord), *van-danam* (praying), *dāsyam* (becoming the servant), *sakhyam* (becoming Krishna’s friend), *ātma-nivedanam* (surrendering oneself entirely to Krishna). “These are the processes for ‘de-centering’ the self or dissolving the self-subsistent ego. But above that is actually seeing Krishna - Reality the Beautiful which is the result of achieving pure love – love for the sake of love.”

During the conversation that ensued, guest Zhana said, “There’s a program called ‘Brain Drain’ on TV. In this program it tells you to ‘not believe what you see because what you see in many cases is not the reality.’ The eyes read the incorrect sentence on the TV screen correctly because the brain interprets it in a different way from what the eyes see.”

“That’s right. These things are well known but modern science gives no credit to the role the mind or belief in our experiences,” Sripad Puri Maharaja said. “In the *Bhagavad-Gita*, Krishna says that the “senses are imperfect and whatever you try to get with the senses, that also can be imperfect, so this is the problem with science,” Rasaraja das Prabhu inserted. “We trust in the senses for what we believe but factually we can experience the difference between what we see and what we believe. They say ‘seeing is believing’ but it is more true that ‘believing is seeing.’” Sripad Puri Maharaja concluded.

Asked if she would like to add to the discussion, Dr. Kitagawa said, “It is so nice to have this kind of discourse,” and wanted to know how these conversations, lectures and ideas are being included in the university and inculcated in their courses. Sripad Puri Maharaja replied, “We need to increase awareness of our presence on campus, and disseminate these ideas more widely. While everyone is sincerely doing what they can to develop our mission here, they also have jobs and responsibilities to their families. So we need the help of more qualified people to carry out our services to the universities. We also try to hold some of our meetings on campus, adver

tise in the local papers, distribute invitations to the public, have a number of websites, a blog, and maintain several mailing lists for those who show interest.”

“I think many people may not understand that what we are teaching is very scientific and may misunderstand us as merely a religion. The failure to understand the unity of science and religion contributes to that sort of misunderstanding, and I think it comes from both the religious and scientific sections of society,” Sripad Puri Maharaja said.



One-on-one talks: Sripad Puri Maharaja with Dr. Kitagawa and Sringara Mataji

“To what extent do you feel this as an entry point for having an interfaith dialogue to take place on the college campuses in order to give people a multi perspective on the different religious aspects of the convergence of science with the spiritual?” Dr. Kitagawa asked. “That is exactly what we want to do. We want to have some type of conference here at the University on science and religion to show they are not in conflict with each other. But the problem is I don’t have anyone to help me with this kind of project,” Sripad Puri Maharaja responded. “I will help you,” Dr. Kitagawa immediately interjected. “That will be greatly appreciated,” Sripad Puri Maharaja happily replied with a broad smile.

With this our wonderful *sadhu-sanga* concluded after *prasadam* was served and honored by all.



The assembled devotees



Front row: Sringara Mataji, Dr. Kitagawa and Dorothy. Back row: Kushum Mataji Zhana and Bakula Mataji



Beautiful Basket of Hawaiian fruits and sweets offered by Dr. Kitagawa and special feast offered to Krishna and His devotees.

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 May be Sent to seva@bviscs.org</p>
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