



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

Sat Chit Ananda - Vedanta and the Scientific Understanding of the Soul

Everyone is searching for knowledge in many different fields – science, philosophy, religion, politics, economics, sociology, manufacturing, and so on. This indicates there is an inherent necessity in everyone to know or seek knowledge. In Sanskrit the word for cognition is *chit* or *chaitya* (knowing, consciousness). It indicates awareness or the need to know something about the self and environment. Everyone is conscious of something different or wants to know different things so they see and understand the environment in various ways. In this way our consciousness is developed according to the way we seek to find satisfaction of *chit* or our knowing potential," Sripad Bhakti Madhava Puri Maharaja, Ph.D. (Sripad Puri Maharaja) said as he began speaking. "*Chit* is not a quality of matter. Molecules don't want to know anything. They just bounce around in whatever way they are impelled by other particles. They do not possess a cognitive propensity. Cognition belongs to the living entities but it's not a material thing you can produce by composition of matter, although scientists claim life is just a combination of chemicals. It is not possible to create conscious life from unconscious matter, scientists have failed to ever do it, and many scientists now realize that cognition is a fundamental symptom of life."

Pointing to the sign on the wall that reads, "All the science and all the scientists in the world together cannot make a single blade of grass." Sripad Puri Maharaja said, "Something as simple as grass, that is growing everywhere, that you trample upon is a very magical substance. No one can make it. The chemical composition is known but to make a blade of grass, that is growing, living, there is no way they can produce that even in their most expensive or sophisticated laboratories. They know the formula for cellulose but not the living aspect of the grass. There is a magical substance there that not only grows but produces copies of itself. We tend to take nature as simply material but if you go to another planet,

there is so much material there but no nature. The thing that creates nature is life, not matter."



Sripad Puri Maharaja speaking with guests: Elizabeth and Dorothy

"According to the ancient teachings, God had to breathe life into matter in order to make Adam and Eve. This means life comes from life. It doesn't come from matter. That's the only conclusion scientifically confirmed by observation. That life comes from matter is simply an ideologically conceived proposition that is not empirically observed. This is something the materialist mentality has to assume in order to justify its metaphysical ideology that everything is material, otherwise there has never been an experiment that showed matter could give rise to life," Sripad Puri Maharaja continued. Making reference to Louis Pasteur^[1] who scientifically established the law of biogenesis or the principle that life comes from life, he went on, "Yet the scientists can't accept the idea that life comes from life because they think that everything has to come from matter. It is too difficult for them to consider life as a fundamental principle of reality because life is not such a simple principle to subject to analysis. It is a spiritual principle. The principle of life is spirit. In *Vedanta-sutra* (the conclusion of all

knowledge), we can find this very principle that life comes from life in the first two aphorisms – “*athato brahma jijnasa, janmadyasya yatah*” This is confirmed in the first line of the *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* (*Bhāgavata Purāna*) 1.1.1:

janmādy asya yato ’nvayād itarataś cārtheṣv abhijñāḥ svarāt

“I meditate upon Lord Śrī Krishna because He is the Absolute Truth and the primeval cause of all causes of the creation, sustenance and destruction of the manifested universes. He is directly and indirectly conscious of all manifestations, and He is independent because there is no other cause beyond Him.”

We have to look carefully at what is being revealed in these texts. “*Athāto brahma jijñāsā* – *athato* means “now” that you are not only a human being but have come in contact with a genuine spiritual teacher (guru) who understands *Brahman* (Spirit). To learn about *Brahman* you need someone who knows what spirit is. Just like if you want to learn medicine, you have to study under a person who knows medicine, not from anyone who happens to live down the street. *Jijñāsā* means one must inquire. *Athāto*, now that you have come in contact with a spiritual teacher, you must inquire about *Brahman*. This is the true purpose or real aim of all our searching for knowledge. Not that we were just meant to seek information endlessly about so many material things and call that knowledge. First of all we cannot know everything in that way, and secondly to know *why* we want to know and what is the conclusion that knowledge is supposed to reveal we have to go to the *Vedanta*,” Sripad Puri Maharaja explained. “*Vedanta* says ‘Now you must approach a teacher of Spirit. Your knowing capacity is there for knowing *Brahman*, this is the first thing. The second thing is ‘*janmādy asya yato*.’ To seek this knowledge, you must first try to inquire about where is it that everything is originating. *Janma adi* (origin, birth) *yasya* (the whole universe of whatever is there) *yatah* (all that is there), where did it come from. This is all explained in detail by the sages in the commentary on *Vedanta*.”

In the *Bhagavata Purana* (old book of ancient knowledge, also known as the *Srimad Bhagavatam*), knowledge of *Bhagavan* (God) is described, and also in the *Bhagavad-gita* (Song of God). The *Bhagavad-gita* contains all the knowledge of the Vedas condensed into one summary form of seven hundred (700) verses. It is a very famous book and read by many famous people. Oppenheimer^[2] upon seeing the annihilative power of the atomic bomb, quoted the *Bhagavad Gita*, ‘Now I am become Death, the destroyer of worlds.’” In Srila Sridhar Maharaja’s *Srimad Bhagavad-gita - The Hidden Treasure of the Sweet Absolute*, 11:32 confirms this:

sri-bhagavan uvaca
kalo ’smi loka-ksaya-krt pravrdhho
lokan samahartum iha pravrttah
rte ’pi tvam na bhavisyanti sarve
ye ’vasthitah pratyanyikesu yodhah

“The Supreme Lord said: I am the time, the mighty vanquisher of all, and I am engaged in destroying the worlds. Even if you do not slay them, not one of the warriors in the enemy party will be spared.”

“Those who do not believe in God or that there’s no master above themselves, they must face the ultimate master of this world – Death. Death is the ultimate master for the atheists who have no belief in anything higher than themselves. No one has ever been able to create life from matter nor has anyone been able to conquer death,” Sripad Puri Maharaja continued. “The first verse of the *Bhagavat Purana* is, ‘*janmādy asya yato ’nvayād itarataś cārtheṣv abhijñāḥ svarāt*.’ The first few words we find in the second verse of *Vedanta Sutra* are also found in the first *sloka* (verse) of the *Bhagavat Purana*. Everything is coming from the original knower (*abhijñāḥ svarāt*), who is independent. He doesn’t come from anything else but Himself.”

Spinoza’s philosophy describes *causa sui* the absolute as the cause of itself. What causes itself is that which has freedom. Freedom means to be self-determined. What is determined by something other than itself is dependent on that, but what is self-determined is independent,” Sripad Puri Maharaja continued. “We are not independent because our consciousness is coming from another consciousness. We were not just generated spontaneously from muddy waters. We are born from our parents. We have to come from another conscious living entity but the *abhijñāḥ svarāt* indicates that the absolute or original knower does not come from anyone else but Himself and therefore He’s the only one that is perfectly free, and from Him all other freedom is coming.”

“By introspection, meditation, we can try to realize these things. This mantra that we chant, ‘*Hare Krishna Hare Krishna Krishna Krishna Hare Hare Hare Rama Hare Rama Rama Rama Hare Hare*’ represents the names of God, His energy as well as Krishna, the *Adi-Purush*, the original independent person and source of all energy,” Sripad Puri Maharaja explained to guest, Elizabeth. So Hare Krishna, Hare Rama is meditation on that original, independent, self-determined Absolute being. When we are meditating on these Names, the Names themselves are connected with the Absolute. Even if you are not concentrating when chanting, these Absolute names have some influence. They will make some changes from within to bring us closer to that truth, the ultimate reality of which all things originated. One can realize, actualize that reality, not by one’s own effort but by the potency or mercy of the Name, the Absolute Truth, when He is pleased to reveal Himself to us. In the meantime, if we can chant the Names it will help us divert from other things that would entangle us further in that which is not of spiritual nature. We practice this mantra on a regular basis, trying to purify our hearts and minds by the practice of *bhakti yoga* (yoga of devotion, of the heart).”

At this point we began chanting, Harinam sankirtan.



Rasaraja das Prabhu, Sripad Puri Maharaja, Elizabeth, and Dorothy during kirtan

“The soul has three qualities – *sat* (to eternally be or live), *chit* (to know or be conscious), *ananda* (to be satisfied or fulfilled). *Sat* refers to eternal being or truth. The soul can never die. The body dies but the soul can never die. This is one of the first lessons of the *Bhagavad-gita*. The soul is eternal. We have to think about why we have this drive to live? Every living entity struggles to live, but why? Sripad Puri Maharaja asked then responded, “There’s an inherent urge to live because the soul is *sat* (eternal). It doesn’t die. It has an eternal, restless living nature. This is a quality of the soul, not the body. The body has a biochemical nature that can start and stop. The nature of this world involves birth and death (*Janma* and *Mrtyu*). This world is called the planet of death (*mrtzulok*). Everything must die here. Death is the Master of even the atheist. Death is the only Lord the atheist knows but one who knows the living Lord knows there’s more than death. Death only belongs to this world but one who knows the higher world of Spirit understands that there’s deathlessness for the soul.” The *Srimad Bhagavad-gita - The Hidden Treasure of the Sweet Absolute*, 2.20 confirms this:

*na jayate mriyate va kadacin
nayam bhutva bhavita va na bhuyah
ajo nityah sasvato 'yam purano
na hanyate hanyamane sarire*

“The soul is neither born nor dies; it has neither been nor will it be created, because it is unborn and eternal. It is ever-youthful, yet ancient. It is not destroyed when the body is destroyed.”

Sripad Puri Maharaja continued, “It is because the spiritual soul is *sat* or eternal that we don’t want to die, while the material body is destined for death only. *Chit* refers to the knowing or conscious potency of the soul. Everyone seeks to know or be conscious. But the soul in the spiritual world doesn’t seek knowledge out of some lack. Rather it is fully conscious in its spiritual environment. There the soul finds self-satisfaction within the absolute realm and does not need to go outside itself to the external non-spiritual world of matter. When one knows and is conscious of their loving spiritual relation with the absolute center then they realize *ananda* or highest inner fulfillment. We all seek fulfillment or satisfaction because *ananda* is another quality of the soul, the spiritual reality that’s behind the superficial attempt to find

happiness in the world of matter that lacks all these qualities. We are spiritual beings in a material body so how do we connect with those higher things in their spiritual nature. To do so requires a wholesale change from the heart. The process for making that change is called *bhakti yoga*, the yoga of devotion. This is what we practice and this is what we teach. Just as life comes from life, we also understand that *bhakti* comes from *bhakti*. The pure teachings of our preceptor Gurus and great devotees provide the inspiration and guidance for our lives and our endeavors. By their grace we may follow them and have some hope of making positive and progressive advancement toward our highest aspiration.”



L-R: Rasaraja das Prabhu, Sripad Puri Maharaja, Dorothy, Elizabeth and guests Surinder ji and Ravi ji with Sripad Puri Maharaja

“*Sat Chit Ananda* – inductively we concluded that eternal life, knowledge, and fulfillment must exist in the spiritual soul since they are essential to life but are not properties of the matter that forms our bodies.. *Vedanta-sutra* tells us to inquire about *Brahman* (Spirit) from which everything comes. And *Srimad Bhagavatam* and Sri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu have pointed to the source of all fulfillment (*ananda*) as the original supremely independent Personality of Godhead, Sri Krishna, the reservoir of all *rasa* or pleasure. *Raso vai sah* or the search for ecstasy is thus said to supersede *brahma jijnasa* or the search for knowledge.” Sripad Puri Maharaja continued. “It’s not only knowing, but also being able to experience and feel separation from that Ultimate Truth and Fulfillment in our lives. That is called realization.”

Meanwhile in the middle of the discussion two additional guests arrived: Surinder ji and Ravi ji, and most of what was earlier discussed was reviewed by Sripad Puri Maharaja. They had both some exposure to the concepts and philosophy of *bhakti yoga*, so it was easy for them to understand without going into much detail. They both showed a great eagerness to learn and participate in the program. A very interactive session ensued as *prasadam* was served and honored by all.



L-R Surinder, and Ravi, Elizabeth, Rasaraj (behind the orange pillar) Sripad Puri Maharaja, and Dorothy

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Sripad Bhakti Madhava Puri Maharaja ki jai

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- [1] <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Biogenesis>
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/ 732-604-4135

Life comes from Life
Matter comes from Life

<http://bviscs.org>

All the science and all the scientists
in the world together cannot make a
single blade of grass.

*"One who is humbler than a blade of grass, more forbearing than a tree, giving due honor to others without desiring it for himself, can truly glorify the Holy Name of the Lord."
Sikshastakam 3 ~ Sri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu*

LINKS

Bhakti Niskama Shanta (2015) Life and consciousness - The Vedāntic view, , 8:5, e1085138; DOI:
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/19420889.2015.1085138>

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