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Vyasa Puja of Srila Bhakti Sundar Govinda dev Goswami Maharaja

"Whose birthday are we celebrating today?" Dorothy, our guest, asked. "Today we are celebrating the Vyas puja (appearance day) of Srila Govinda Maharaja⁽¹⁾ one of the acharyas (spiritual teacher) in the preceptorial line of our *sampradaya* (school)," Sripad Bhakti Madhava Puri Maharaj, Ph.D (Sripad Puri Maharaja) responded. "Krishna states, *ācāryamī mānī vijānīyān*" "Know that I am the acharya." This is confirmed in the *Śrīmad Bhāgavatam* 11.17.27

*ācāryamī mānī vijānīyān
nāvanmanyeta 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. "



Srila Bhakti Sundar Govinda Dev-Goswami Maharaj Vyasa Puja

Why do we call it 'appearance day' and not birthday? Sripad Puri Maharaja asked then responded, "Krishna is eternal, infinite. He can do whatever He wants. We are all His *chit shakti* (infinitesimal portion of the Lord's conscious energy). Thus Krishna tells Arjuna, *Vasudev sarvam iti* (Vasudeva Krishna is everything)." This is confirmed in the *Bhagavad Gita - The Hidden Treasure of the Sweet Absolute*, 7.19:

*bahunam janmanam ante
jnanavan mam prapadyate
vasudevah sarvam iti
sa mahatma su-durlabhah*

After many births, the enlightened soul (blessed with devotional association) realizes that everything is of the nature of {subordinate to} Vāsudeva, and thus he surrenders unto Me. Such a great soul is very rare.

"Everyone is a manifestation of the energy of the Supreme Lord. The living entity has its free will to develop his/herself independently for their own purposes and without remembrance of their complete dependence on Krishna Who is the origin of themselves," Sripad Puri Maharaja said. "When we find someone in this world who is presenting knowledge of Krishna in a very pure scriptural way, then we understand that person to be a manifestation of the Lord's mercy who teaches us about Him for our benefit. It is not the individual's power but Krishna's power and mercy that comes to us in the form of guru. This is how He extends His mercy to the fallen souls, to those who have forgotten that they are eternal servants of Krishna. The guru reminds us of what we are forgetting about Krishna," Sripad Puri Maharaja said. "Our whole existence is dependent upon Him."

So we say 'appear' to distinguish guru from ordinary persons, who are forced by their previous activities to take birth in this world because by nature's law they are under the influence of *karma* (reaction of good/bad deeds). They are forced to take birth here whilst those pure souls who already understand by the mercy of the Lord their relationship with the Lord, are said to appear by the grace of the Lord. So we celebrate the appearance day of guru. Of course guru always thinks himself an ordinary person."



Sripad Puri Maharaja with guests: Dorothy and Madhu. Pic # 2 - Syamasundar Prabhu, Sringara mataji, Rasaraja Prabhu and Nitai Prabhu (back toward camera).

"A genuine devotee knows that it is not *his* knowledge that he is giving to others. Knowledge is his guru's property - it is Krishna's knowledge of Himself. In the *Bhagavad Gita 10.10* Krishna says, '*tesam satata-yuktanam/ bhajatam priti-purvakam/dadami buddhi-yogam tam*' *Tesam satata* – those who are always worshipping Me, dedicating their mind, their heart to Me, who are 'always thinking of Me.' *Yuktanam* means 'yoke' like yoga. 'Those who are always connecting with Me all the time,'. *dadami buddhi-yogam tam*, 'I give to you the intelligence to come to Me.' *Bhajatam* means 'those who are worshipping Me,' *priti-purvakam* means affectionately, with some attachment, not that they are dedicating their hearts to the Lord out of duty, obligation or to make others think that they are great devotees," Sripad Puri Maharaja explained. "They have some attachment to Krishna and they can't bear to live without that feeling of attachment or love for Krishna and the feeling of always serving and wanting to serve Krishna and His devotees. To those persons, *dadami buddhi-yogam tam*, Krishna gives the knowledge of Himself. Devotees knows that only by the Lord's mercy he gets that attachment and knowledge and he doesn't claim it as his own doing. These things are entirely the property of the Lord and his/her gurudev. *Bhagavad Gita - The Hidden Treasure of the Sweet Absolute*, 10:10 states:

*tesam satata-yuktanam
bhajatam priti-purvakam
dadami buddhi-yogam tam
yena mam upayanti te*

"To those devotees who are always lovingly engaged in My service, I give the divine inspiration by which they can come to Me."

"The Lord is eternal and He can appear continually in this world. He doesn't only have to come once. He can appear many times, in

many different places, in many different forms human and non human. He comes in His own *Visnu tattva* form (Avatar), like Krishna, Rama, Varaha, but he comes once in a day of Brahma in His original form as Krishna. The acharyas are different manifestations of the Lord, but still the Lord can appear through the acharya as a teacher, a devotee or in any other way," Sripad Puri Maharaja continued. "Once a year we celebrate the *vyasa puja* (appearance day) and worship the acharya. The original acharya is Vyasadev (an incarnation of God), who wrote down all the *sastras* (scriptures) that contain the knowledge of God. The acharyas through their teachings are also distributing that knowledge just like Vyasadev did in writing. The acharyas teaching in the line of Vyasadev are thus recognized by calling the acharya's appearance *Vyasa puja* (worship of Vyasa)."

At this point Sripad Puri Maharaja asked everyone if they would like to offer obeisances, flowers and kirtan to Srila Govinda Maharaj. Rasaraja das Prabhu recited Srila Govinda Maharaja's *pranam* mantra: *gurvabhista-supurakam guru-ganair asisa-sambhusitam* and then sang *Sri Guru Vandanam - śrī-guru-caraṇa-padma, kevala-bhakati-sadma*^[2] composed by Srila Narottama Dasa Thakura.

*gurvabhista-supurakam guru-ganair asisa-sambhusitam
chintyachintya-samasta-veda-nipunam sri-rupa-panthanugam
govindabhidham ujvalam vara-tanum bhakty anvitam sundaram
vande visva-gurun cha divya-bhagavat-premno hi bija-pradam*

"I worship the holy lotus feet of he who perfectly fulfills the most cherished wish of his divine master -- who is adorned resplendently with the blessings of his *guru varga*; who is adept in all Vedic conceptions, both conceivable and inconceivable; who is the faithful follower in the line of Sri Rupa; who is known as Srila Govinda Maharaja; whose beautiful divine figure revels in the mellows of divine love; who is the guru of the entire universe and the bestower of the seed of divine love for the Supreme Lord."



L-R: Syamasundara Prabhu on guitar, Sringara mataji, Rasaraja Prabhu on kartal, Sripad Puri Maharaja and Nitai (back toward the camera). Surottama Prabhu, Bakula Mataji

After everyone offered flowers, Sripad Puri Maharaja said, "Srila Govinda Maharaj directly told some things to us about his birth and how he came to the Math. In December 1929 he was born in Bamunpara, West Bengal, India about six miles from where Srila Sridar Maharaj (his beloved Gurudev) appeared in Hapaniya. His parents, Nitaipad and

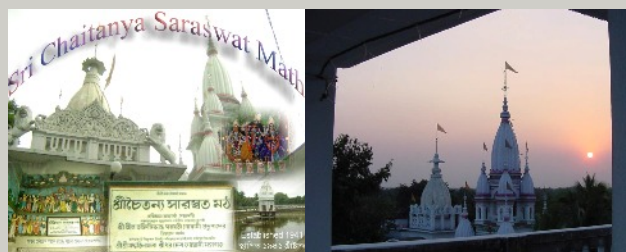
Tarangani devi, had their first child but he lived for only one year then died. His parents were thus concerned that if they had another child he may not be attacked by any evil that may take him away. For that reason they approached Lord Shiva at His *mandir* (temple) and prayed, 'Please give us a son and kindly protect him. We promise you that he will take *sannyas* (renunciate) by Your grace.' The time arrived and Tarangani gave birth to Srila Govinda Maharaj, and as soon as he was born the father, even before seeing the baby, went back to the Shiva temple and prayed 'thank you for giving us a son.' Lord Shiva replied, 'This is my son and I will protect him so no evil would touch him.' Afterwards he returned home and told his wife, thus Srila Govinda Maharaj became known as Shiva's son."

"Typically when the babies are small a *kavacha* (amulet) and marks are put on them to protect them from evil, but because Lord Shiva told Nitaipad, 'I will be there to protect him,' he said to his wife 'no he doesn't need all of that, take them off,'" Sripad Puri Maharaja said laughingly. "A month after his birth, the parents wanted to take him to the same Shiva temple to present him to the Lord. On the way they met a tiger who was threatening them so the mother remembering Lord Shiva's words, took the baby and put him on the ground. The tiger looked at the baby and walked away. The mother had so much faith in Lord Shiva's words. In that way he grew up fearlessly."

"His father was a *kirtania* (professional singer) and sometimes they would sing some very high Vaisnava songs. His father would not allow him to hear them but still Srila Govinda Maharaja would somehow manages to listen to what they were singing from a distance, pretending he was studying when actually he was listening to the words of the kirtans," Sripad Puri Maharaja continued. "When there would be some function, the father would be required to come and sing at that function. Sometimes there were assemblies for hearing Hari Katha (glorification of Krishna pastimes) that he would like to attend. One time when he was a teenager there were some devotees that came from the Sri Chaitanya Saraswat Math. Srila Sridhar Maharaja would send the devotees out to the villages to preach. One of the devotees who was preaching attracted Srila Govinda Maharaja attention. He had heard so many preachers but this one was saying something different and particularly enchanting. So he became friends with those devotees and they asked Srila Govinda Maharaj, 'would you like to come back with us to the Math?'" "Srila Govinda Maharaj was of such cordial nature that he would always say 'yes' to people. He was a simple boy and he didn't want to say no to those devotees, so he said he would go. At the same time he really did not want to go. But in his life he never told a lie, so how could he go back on his word? In this way he began thinking 'what can I do?' He went up to those devotees again and told them 'look I can only go with you if you are ready to take me immediately otherwise I cannot go tomorrow.' He said this purposely because he

knew they couldn't take him back that same day since they had another program the next day. He figured if he tells them that they will say they cannot take him and he would be relieved of his commitment. After he told them 'I can only come today. I will not be able to go tomorrow,' one brahmachari (male celibate devotee) said 'OK, come on, I will take you'" Sripad Puri Maharaj said laughingly as did all the other devotees. "That night that *brahmachari* (named Jayadvaita Prabhu) took him late that night. It was about two o'clock in the morning when they reached the Ganges at Nandan ghat. There are usually boats to take the people across the river but because it was so early in the morning there were no boatmen, so they had to swim across to Nabadwip. It was early in the morning and Srila Govinda Maharaja was walking with Jayadvaita Prabhu, who was a disciple of Srila Bhaktisiddanta Saraswati Thakur but was staying with Srila Sridar Maharaja at his Marh after Srila Bhaktisiddanta Saraswati Thakur's disappearance.."

"The original Math building was not very impressive. There was no temple at that time. It was just a little building. When Srila Govinda Maharaja first saw this, his heart dropped. 'This is the Math?' He was thinking of the great Maths mentioned in *Mahabharata* or the *Ramayana* so when he saw the Math he was very disappointed. Then Jayadvaita told him, 'Yes, it's very simple but there's a great vaisnava (devotee of Lord Krishna) living there.' Anyhow they went upstairs to the veranda where Srila Sridar Maharaj was staying and who was chanting at that time. They both offered obeisance. Srila Sridhar Maharaja saw them and said, 'From where did you get this boy?' Then Jayadvaita told him, 'from Bamunpara.' 'Oh, this is a nice, intelligent boy.' Srila Govinda Maharaja said that when Srila Sridhar Maharaja was talking like that, he was meaning, "I can train this boy to become a good weapon (preacher) for our mission," Sripad Puri Maharaja continued. "Srila Sridhar Maharaja had a very good impression of him from the very beginning just by seeing him and knowing where he was from. He was from a Brahman family. After spending a short time there Srila Sridhar Maharaja had decided he wanted to make him his successor and so the *brahmacharis* in the Math, at that time, became jealous. Srila Govinda Maharaja said 'That's when my fighting life began.' They wanted to have his position."



Sri Chaitanya Saraswat Math at Nabadwip, W.Bengal, India

"On the day that he arrived at the Math everyone was fasting for Nrsimha Chaturdasi. Srila Govinda Maharaja had never fasted completely (with no food). He observed Ekadasi but he would eat something without grains or beans. However that day at the Math they were completely fasting. It was an unusual experience for him so he was very hungry. He told

Jayadvaita, 'I am very hungry. I have to eat something. I am not used to this fasting.' So Jayadvaita Prabhu told him, 'Go to that papaya tree, take a papaya and cut it in half. Offer half to Krishna and the other half you can eat,' and he did that. Later that night, they made some potato prasadam and he felt satisfied."

"He was a very restless person. He was always engaged in some service or other but sometimes when he had nothing to do, he would climb the bamboo flag pole, come down and go up again. Other times he would climb the mango trees and eat the mangoes and all the devotees would chastise him, 'why are you taking those mangoes. Those mangoes are for the deities,'" Sripad Puri Maharaja continued laughingly. "I remembered when I was living at the Math sometimes the monkeys would come and take the mangoes also and one devotee there had a BB gun and would shoot at the monkeys to chase them away because they wanted to save the mangoes for offerings to the Deities. Like that Srila Govinda Maharaja was restless and little rebellious too."

"Shortly after he arrived, the time came for *Ratha Yatra* (Chariot festival) so they went to *Sri Dham* Jagannatha Puri with Srila Sridhar Maharaja. They arrived a few days early, so Srila Sridhar Maharaja sent the devotees out to preach in the nearby areas and they took Srila Govinda Maharaja with them. When it was time to come back one *brahmachari* wouldn't let him return to *Sri Dham* Jagannatha Puri," Sripad Puri Maharaja continued. "Srila Sridhar Maharaja had to send a telegraph to tell that *brahmachari*, 'let him come back here immediately.' He was very angry that that *brahmachari* did not let Srila Govinda Maharaja come back. Srila Sridhar Maharaja said, 'He is a young man and should experience *Ratha yatra* so let him come so he can see.' At that time Srila Govinda Maharaja was about seventeen years old. That *brahmachari* brought him back. Srila Sridhar Maharaja told Srila Govinda Maharaja, "I want to give you initiation' and he did on that very day of *Ratha yatra* and told him 'Chant attentively and don't worry about checking the time.' His initiation was unusual because in the Math, a newcomer had to wait six months before receiving initiation. Anyhow it was about a month after Srila Govinda Maharaja had joined the Math when he got initiated. It was a special exception. Many there were grumbling, 'Why was he getting a special privilege like that?'"



Sri Chaitanya Saraswat Math panoramic view from a corner of Govinda kunda

"After about six months at the Math Srila Sridhar Maharaja wanted him to take Sanskrit lessons so he arranged for him to learn under a pandit (teacher) in Nabadwip. One day while travelling to his lessons he met his uncle. His uncle said, 'Oh, we were looking all over for you. Where are you staying? Why did you leave like that?' He explained the whole thing and told them where he was staying. He then realized that was a mistake to tell them where he was staying," Sripad Puri Maharaja continued. "The next day his uncle came with some big men and pandits. They came into the Math and said 'We are taking this boy. He belong to us.' Srila Govinda Maharaja began shouting 'They are trying to take me away!'"

Someone was there nearby who had much respect for Srila Sridhar Maharaja, so he went up to them and said 'You are trying to take this boy, you've been saying he belongs to you, at least you can go to Sridhar Maharaja and let him know.' They agreed and so they went up to see Srila Sridhar Maharaja. When they told Srila Sridhar Maharaja what they wanted to do, he said 'First you have to scripturally defeat me and if you can defeat me, then I will let you take him.' Those men agreed. They thought they can defeat this old man. First day they went, they were defeated. After three days, finally they had to leave defeated without Srila Govinda Maharaja. Srila Sridhar Maharaja was very learned and has often defeated so many big pandits with the proper concepts of vaisnavism and the scriptures."

Around the early 1980's after Srila Prabhupada^[3] left this world (Nov, 1977), several devotees had become disappointed with ISKCON^[3] and they left the Mayapur compound to go and hear from Srila Sridhar Maharaj to get some spiritual nourishment and thus Srila Sridhar Maharaja began preaching to the Westerners. I went there in 1980. I remember Srila Govinda Maharaja was so kind to all the devotees that would come. He would make sure they had *prasad* (sacred food offered to the Lord) and would arrange a place for them if they wanted to stay," Sripad Puri Maharaja said. "He was always doing everything he could for the devotees. Later we learned that Srila Sridhar Maharaja felt himself too old to handle a lot of new people, Westerners especially, because he could not properly hear their intonation. He was already in his 80's, so Srila Govinda Maharaja said 'If you preach to them, then I will manage everything.' Srila Govinda Maharaja built several new building where we would have our own room, bathroom, everything. He built a whole new ashram building there among several other buildings for our comfort. In that way Srila Sridhar Maharaja would preach and Govinda Maharaja would make all the arrangements for *prasad* and staying."

In 1985 Srila Sridhar Maharaja told Srila Govinda Maharaja 'I want you to take *sannyas* (renounced order of life).' He was always serving Srila Sridhar Maharaja, even while living in Kolkata, so that everything was being managed by Srila Govinda Maharaja – all the construction work that was going on at the Math, all the monetary funds, and so on. I was there at that time and Srila Govinda Maharaja, ever affectionate to all, asked me in a humble way what he should do. I wanted to encourage him so I foolishly said, 'When the cowherd boys saw the cave of the

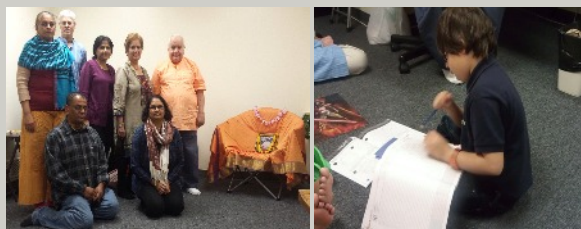
Agasura demon's mouth they said 'Oh, here's a big cave let's go in.' Some of the boys said 'We shouldn't go there, it's too uncertain what will happen.' The other boys said 'We don't have to worry, Krishna will protect us.' Then I said, 'If you do it, Krishna will arrange everything for you.' Still he felt very reluctant, Finally Srila Sridhar Maharaja said 'If you don't take *sannyas*, I am going to die right now and this Math will go to ruin.' So he was kind of forced and took *sannyas* in 1985."

In 1986, during Gaur Purnima, Srila Sridhar Maharaja told the whole assembly of devotees that 'I am going to make Srila Govinda Maharaja my successor. From this day onwards everyone must accept him as Acharya, and whoever doesn't like this, they may leave.' He was strong. A few years later Srila Sridhar Maharaja in August 1988, passed into eternal *samadhi* and Srila Govinda Maharaja arranged for a beautiful 'Temple of Love in Separation' to be built on the Math grounds where Srila Sridhar Maharaja's holy form was placed.

In 1992, Srila Acharya Maharaja^[4] came to the Math and became a disciple of Srila Govinda Maharaja. In Dec.,2009, during the *Vyas puja* of Srila Govinda Maharaja, he told, 'I am announcing that Srila Bhakti Niraml Acharya Maharaja is my successor and everyone should affectionately accept him and cooperate with him.' In March 2010 Srila Govinda Maharaja entered his *samadhi*." In the same way as his Gurdeva, Srila Acharya Maharaja built a beautiful 'Temple of Love and Affection' next to Srila Sridhara Maharaja's *samadhi* where Srila Govinda Maharaja was placed to oversee everything.

The most memorable thing I keep in my heart is how affectionate Srila Govinda Maharaja was to us. We came to the Math to hear Srila Sridhar Maharaja but stayed there because of Srila Govinda Maharaja. He cared for us and he always used to say the only reason he stayed at the Math was because of Srila Sridhar Maharaja's affection for him.

"Did you know him personally?" Dorothy asked. "Yes. It was my very good fortune," Sripad Puri Maharaj responded.




Back Row: Bakula Mataji, Rasaraja Prabhu, guests Madhu and Dorothy with Sripad Puri Maharaja, Front: Surottama Pabhu.Sringara Mataji, Pic # 2: Nitai Prabhu

Next Sripad Rasaraja Prabhu began telling us of his memories of Srila Govinda Maharaja, "I was very fortunate. I met Srila Govinda

Maharaja when he was on his world tour in Venezuela. At that time I was looking for a guide because my guru had left his position after two years of my living in the temple. That was in 1982. I was waiting for another guru but I was not so excited to look for another one because at that time many of the *sannyasis* from ISKCON started to have a lot of problems, so I was waiting to see if the situation will improve and what I will do about my spiritual life. I remember I was working in a bank and one of Srila Govinda Maharaja's disciples was distributing some books and he asked me if I had read any of the books from Srila Govinda Maharaja. I said 'no' because at that time in ISKCON they didn't want you to read any other books that were not from Srila Prabhupada. He gave me one of the books and I read it. While reading I said 'This is exactly as Srila Prabhupada says' so like that I have a connection with the temple and Srila Sridhar Maharaja. Then eventually that devotee said Srila Govinda Maharaja was coming to Venezuela. Everyone was very excited. When he came, I was not sure if I wanted to take initiation but some of the devotees already living in the temple encouraged me. By their mercy I received the first and second initiation from Srila Govinda Maharaja. My son was also was initiated by him."

"My personal feeling about Srila Govinda Maharaja was that he was a very advanced person in devotion but at the same time he was so humble. I admire when he said that when he goes to the temple he wants to sit at the back of the temple because 'all the devotees are more advanced so they can go to the front. I will sit in the back,'" Rasaraja das Prabhu continued. "He was not a person who was pretending to be humble. He was very genuine and every time he would speak he would try to please everybody. He never said anything that would make you feel bad. He always tried to give you some hope. I never expected to get a guru of that quality in my life. In the scriptures it says that 'by the grace of Krishna you can find a guru and by the grace of guru you can find Krishna.' It is also said that only by the grace of Krishna can you have a relation with a *sadguru* (genuine guru) not somebody that is trying to cheat you. And that guru by his grace can show Krishna. So the relationship with guru is eternal but not the physical aspect of guru but the eternal aspect of guru."

After glorifying Gurudev *prasadam* was served and honored by all.

<p style="text-align: center;">Your humble servant, Kushum Devi Dasi (New York)</p>		<p style="text-align: center;">Service Donations https://ipn.intuit.com/ pay/Bhaktivedantalnst itute</p>
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^[1] Srila Bhakti Sundar Govinda Maharaj, Sevaite-President-Acharya of Sri
^[1] Sri Chaitanya Saraswat Math:

http://scsmath.com/docs/govinda_maharaj.html

^[2] <http://kksongs.org/songs/s/srigurucaranapadma.html>

^[3] His Divine Grace A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Srila Prabhupada (Srila Prabhupada) is the founder Acharya of the International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON)

^[4] Srila Acharya Maharaj: http://scsmath.com/docs/acharya_maharaj.html