

Sri Sri Guru Gaurangau Jayatah
Bhakti Vedanta Institute
Princeton University Harinama
Princeton, NJ
November 22, 2014

Led by Rasaraja das Prabhu on kartals (hand cymbal), we began Harinama Sankirtana with the Panca Tattva mantra followed by the Maha Mantra while Sripad Bhakti Madhava Puri Maharaj, Ph.D (Sripad Puri Maharaj) distributed our brochure at Princeton's Palmer Square Park. About forty-five minutes later we went back to the Bhakti Vedanta Institute (BVI) office to begin our regular Saturday *sanga* program.



Spd. Rasaraja das Prabhu with Sripad Puri Maharaj

Sripad Puri Maharaj opened *sanga* by reading from Srila Bhakti Raksaka Sridhara Maharaja's^[1] *Bhagavad Gita - The Hidden Treasure of the Sweet Absolute*: chapter 8 Verse 19 – 23: The Merciful Absolute. It states:

*bhuta-gramah sa evayam
bhutva bhutva praliyate
ratry-agame 'vasah partha
prabhavaty ahar-agame*

*paras tasmad tu bhavo 'nyo
'vyakto 'vyaktat sanatanah
yah sa sarvesu bhutesu
nasyatsu na vinasyati*

“O Pārtha, the multitude of beings are helplessly {sub- ject to the law of karma} born again and again. With the coming of Lord Brahmā’s night they are absorbed, and with the coming of his day they are again born.” “But superior to this unmanifest {Lord Brahmā} there is another unmanifest, and that existence is beginningless and transcendental to the perception of the living beings. He is not destroyed when all beings are destroyed.”

“There are two unmaifested beginnings of the creation. One is Lord Brahma,^[2] whom during His night the whole universe and all the living entities are withdrawn and during His day the universe becomes manifested again. One day of Lord Brahma is calculated at 4,320,000,000 years and His night last for the same amount of time,” Sripad Puri Maharaj explained. “During His day everything becomes manifested and then at night, it becomes unmanifested. So for four billion years it’s unmanifested. That’s only one night of Lord Brahma and He lives for one hundred years. For us that is like trillions of years. In all that time the universe becomes manifested and unmanifested repeatedly.”

“Then there’s another unmanifested beginnings, that from which Lord Brahma is coming. He is not always manifested. When He is unmanifested where does He go?” Sripad Puri Maharaj asked, then responded, “He goes back to the Hirangarbha, means Maha-Vishun and how many years that is, we don’t know. That’s eternal. Here’s it’s explained that that beginning is ‘beginningless and transcendental to the perception of the living beings. He is not destroyed when all beings are destroyed.’ Such is the grand idea of the Vedic conception of the universe. So, Maha-Vishnu comes when the Lord wants to manifest this material lila (pastimes) of material existence.”

Sripad Puri Maharaj then went on to explain Verse 22,

*avyakto 'ksara ity uktas
tam ahuh paramam gatim
yam prapya na nivartante
tad dhama paramam mama*

“He is said to be the Unmanifest and the Invincible, proclaimed in the Upanisads to be the supreme goal, reaching whom one does not return to this world. Know that destination to be My supreme abode.”



Sections of the audience during Sanga with Sripad Puri Maharaj

In *Bhagavad Gita - The Hidden Treasure of the Sweet Absolute*, Chapter 8 Verse 22 states:

*purusah sa parah partha
bhaktya labhyas tv ananyaya
yasyantah-sthani bhutani
yena sarvam idam tatam*

“Pârtha, I, the Supreme Person, within whom all beings are situated and by whom this whole universe is pervaded, am attainable only by exclusive devotion.”

Sripad Puri Maharaj further explained, “Any of those expansions of Krishna we would be able to have a relationship with, however, all our exploitative consciousness must be eliminated before we can even think of relating to such divine beings. That means one must be free from the cycle of *samsara* - birth and death, even though one becomes unmanifested at the destruction of the universe, there would still be bondage to the material world. The enjoying tendencies will still be in the consciousness of such jiva (soul). They could not reach Kshirodakasayi Vishnu. The only souls that could reach Kshirodakasayi Vishnu would be those who have purified themselves of all material desire to exploit, to enjoy separately from Krishna. Only those who have surrendered themselves fully to the service of and the will of the Lord, giving up all independent existence, then they could enter into those higher planes. That is the meaning to entering into the plane of dedication, of coming in touch with Krishna or any of His forms, even His Vaikuntha forms. To come in touch with that plane is to be free from all other exploitative, domineering and dominating tendencies,” Sripad Puri Maharaj continued.

“*Saranagti* (surrender) is the platform from which the whole spiritual existence is beginning,” Sripad Puri Maharaj said. “*Saranagati* comes beyond the plane of renunciation, *Vairagya* (the Viroja River). The Viroja River means the plane of renunciation and below that is the plane of exploitation, including the planetary system of the material worlds – *Bhur Bhuva Sva Jnana Tapa*, and so on, plus the hellish planets. These are all the planes of exploitative consciousness, even *Satyalok* (mode of goodness) is a plane of exploitation. Those who want to be good, they have some motive to enjoy apart from the Supreme Lord. We have to come to the plane of *sudha bhakti* (pure love), in which one is totally dedicated to satisfying Guru and Krishna. Any other impetus, other than to be a surrendered soul to the will of the Lord would constitute material desire. Krishna says, ‘I am attainable only by exclusive devotion’”

In further reading, Verse 23 of the 8th Chapter of the *Bhagavad Gita*, Sri Krishna says: “O Bharatarsabha, now I shall describe to you the circumstances in which the yogis attain either liberation or rebirth at the moment of death.”

“So even the yogis, who meditate on Paramatma, if they don’t attain devotion to Krishna or to Narayan, they will have to take birth again also. They may reach the stage of *Vairagya* but if they haven’t developed the attitude or mood of devotion they will have to

come back again to take birth,” Sripad Puri Maharaj explained. “Liberation (*moksha*) would not count for anything spiritual. *Moksha* would not help to get you to the spiritual world. Only when one awakens some sense of devotion, has some connection with the *antaranga shakti* (spiritual potency) then that would draw him to the inner plane from which the spiritual life will awaken. Without having developed that connection with the *antaranga shakti*, one would be impelled to return from the plane of renunciation to the the plane of external experience (*bahiranga shakti*),.”

“So you get *antaranga* only when you reach what level of your life?” Sobha ji asked. “You will get that when you have actual attraction or taste that comes spontaneously from your heart for service to Krishna. It is when you think, ‘I feel happy when I am serving Krishna’ and when ‘I am not serving Krishna I don’t feel happy. I feel like there’s something missing. I can’t be satisfied. Whatever else I may do has some kind of bitter taste,’” Sripad Puri Maharaj responded.

Verses 24 – 26, states that, “Upon leaving the body, the knowers of Brahman attain Brahman via the path of fire, light, day, the waxing moon and the sun’s northern ascent. Upon leaving the body, the karma-yogi (reaches the heavenly plane via the path of smoke, night, the waning moon and the sun’s southern ascent, but returns to undergo rebirth.”

“The Bhagavat Gita explains Karma-Yoga, Bhakti-Yoga, Jnana Yoga and Astganga-Yoga. Karma yogis are those who are still engaged in fruitive activities, doing their duties because they want to become liberated. They have to take birth again because they are still seeking the fruit of their actions, which is exploitation. So those that still have that exploitative mood within their heart they will have to take rebirth even if they do pious things, because there’s some self interest in that activity. In order to fulfill that desire, to feed that mentality, again and again they will have to take rebirth,” Sripad Puri Maharaj explained.

“Those who want Brahman, the plane of neutrality, where they don’t want anything, they just want to free themselves of desire and come to a plane of complete nothingness, where they are not disturbed by anything, that kind of endeavor is also of self-interest. It’s actually a kind of enviousness of God, of serving Krishna or of giving Krishna any pleasure. It is like thinking, ‘I don’t want anything for myself but I am not going to give anything to Krishna either,’” Sripad Puri Maharaj said smilingly.

Are *Brahman* and *Tatastha sakti* different conception? Rasaraja das Prabhu asked. “Yes, Brahman is the generalized plane of spirit whereas *Tatastha sakti* is the marginal energy of the Lord, between the spiritual and material planes. Brahman is the plane of spiritual equilibrium as exemplified by the four Kumars^[3]. They are related to Krishna in the Brahman feature. Their relationship is of *santa rasa*. Brahman is not called *tatastha*. There’s no choice involved there, that’s Krishna’s *tattva* of a particular form of a generalized nature. Brahman is one aspect of the Absolute “*brahmeti paramatmeti bhagavan iti sabdyate*.” Srila Guru Maharaj calls it the ‘all accommodating plane.’ This is confirmed in the *Srimad Bhagavatam* 1.2.11:

*vadanti tat tattva-vidas
tattvam yaj jnanam advayam
brahmeti paramatmeti
bhagavan iti sabdyate*

“Learned transcendentalists who know the Absolute Truth call this non-dual substance Brahman, Paramatma or Bhagavan.”

Tatastha sakti is the plane of the jiva (individual soul), it’s the line that separates spiritual and material. It’s like a plane of consciousness of the individual soul, just like the mind, which has the function of choosing and deciding either this or that. So *Tatastha sakti* means where we have a choice. A position of indecision, a plane of consciousness,” Sripad Puri Maharaj responded. “You can choose Brahman, Vaikunta or Krishna loka from the *Tatastha sakti* level. The nature of the jiva is *tatastha*. Sri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu tells Sanatan Goswami in the *Caitanya Caritāmṛta*, ‘*jīvera 'svarūpa' haya — kṛṣṇera 'nitya-dāsa' / kṛṣṇera 'tatasthā-śakti' 'bhedābheda-prakāśa'*’ - He’s saying there that the *tatastha sakti* describes the energy of the jiva as being one with and different from the Lord’s.” Śrī Caitanya *Caritāmṛta Madhya* 20.108-10 confirms this:

*jīvera 'svarūpa' haya — kṛṣṇera 'nitya-dāsa'
kṛṣṇera 'tatasthā-śakti' 'bhedābheda-prakāśa'
sūryāśa-kiraṇa, yaiche agni-jvālā-caya
svābhāvika kṛṣṇera 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 [*antaranga, tatastha, bahiranga*].”

“If you mean the the *brahmajyoti* or effulgence of Brahman is the same as the *tatastha shakti*, then we know that Srila Guru Maharaja did make that identification. He sometimes described the *tatastha shakti* as being like the pencil rays of the *brahmajyoti*.”

In concluding Chapter 8 of Srila Sridhara Maharaja’s *Bhagavad Gita - The Hidden Treasure of the Sweet Absolute*, Sripad Puri Maharaj read and explained verses 27-28:

“ O Pārtha, the devotee (bhakti-yoga) who knows these bright and dark paths is not deluded. Therefore, O Arjuna, be ever fixed in transcendental, exclusive devotion.”
“Thus knowing of My glories and the glories of devotion for Me, the devoted soul, surpassing the scripturally cited fruits of piety achieved by chanting the Vedas and performing sacrifice, austerity and charity, attains My supreme, holy abode.”

“Here Krishna is recommending you engage in bhakti-yoga (devotion), there you will achieve permanent liberation, perfect existence in the spiritual world that is beyond birth and death, transcendental to the plane of *samsara*,” Sripad Puri Maharaj said.

After this point the floor was opened to several comments, questions and answers.

“Guru Maharaj explained that that kind of *mukti* (liberation) is like getting a passport but to get to the spiritual platform, you need a visa, some approval to get in. With just a passport it doesn’t mean you are going to the spiritual world, you are still in the material world and you will have to come back,” Rasaraja das Prabhu said.

“Maharaj, I’ve noticed people have that intensity towards a particular way like worshipping Lord Shiva or Ganesha. Does Krishna say devotion to any God will take him there or devotion only to Him will take him to Krishna?” Amit ji asked. “It’s natural for us to be devoted, to be attracted to or love someone, to offer some service to someone. For example, you are working so you are offering your service to your boss; it may be more like a forced or necessary service, but it’s service nonetheless. Everyone is serving someone; it’s not a question that we are not serving. It’s our *dharma* (essence) to serve,” Sripad Puri Maharaj responded. “But we want to do something more than just our duty, we want to have some devotion, some love for something or someone than just doing it because we are getting something in return. It’s natural to have some kind of devotion or attraction to someone, and some are attracted to the demigods. They feel the calling of Shiva, Durga, Ganesha or whoever they feel like they have to serve. Yet in that type of devotion there’s something for themselves in it. They are looking for some mundane result from it. We do get pleasure from devotion, from loving someone; no doubt it gives us pleasure. We may think that only by taking, we get pleasure but no, by giving we get even more pleasure,” Sripad Puri Maharaj responded. “The aim of those different types of pleasure is one’s self – I’m getting the pleasure. It’s hard to do something if we are not getting any pleasure. We are searching for pleasure but we don’t know that that pleasure can be achieved by complete surrender to Krishna without any self interest. If we can catch the pleasure that’s involved in that type of existence, though we are not looking for pleasure, there’s pleasure in that and that pleasure is of the highest nature possible. It seems difficult for us to understand how complete selfless surrender to Krishna can have such complete transcendental pleasure associated with it. If one gets the taste of that pleasure he would never be able to leave it for a moment. It’s so intense. That is what we are told by the saints and scriptures.”

In explaining love further Sripad Puri Maharaj described the intense love Srimati Radharani and the Gopis have for Sri Krishna, where the Gopis waited for 125 years in separation from Krishna. “They are willing to suffer so much misery because that love is of such nectar that they would tolerate that pain of separation because even in that separation there’s pleasure, the highest transcendental pleasure,” Sripad Puri Maharaj continued. “It’s very hard to explain what it is. In the transcendental world, there’s also a love that withstands even neglect. That kind of love is there for Sri Krishna.” Sriman Mahaprabhu says to Krishna in the *Siksastakam* Verse 8,

*aslisya va pada-ratam pinastu mam
adarsanam marma-hatam karotu va
yatha tatha va vidadhatu lampato
mat-prana-nathas tu sa eva naparah*

“Krishna may embrace me in love or trample me under His feet. He may break my heart by hiding Himself from me. Let that debauchee do whatever He likes, but He will always be the only Lord of my life.”

“Love in separation is a deep, intense, transcendental feeling, an ecstatic fulfillment that is not the ordinary type of satisfaction we get from ordinary type of love. Anyhow, that is the ideal that is given in the scripture.”

“How linear is that journey to reach Krishna?” Revant Prabhu asked. “It’s very crooked process,” Sripad Puri Maharaj responded. “Is anyone sure of completing that journey?” was Revant Prabhu’s follow-up question. “There we would have to have faith, *śraddha*. In this path *śraddha* is the first necessity. It is said by Rupa Goswami, ‘*ādau śraddhā tataḥ sādhu saṅgo ’tha bhajana-kriyā / tato ’nartha-nivṛttiḥ syāt tato niṣṭhā rucis tataḥ*’^[4] First there must be faith, then *sadhu-sanga* means to associate with those who are also on the path searching for Krishna. Associating with those who are on the spiritual path of dedication that you are on, engaging in the activities of worship, chanting, offering and taking *prasadam*, visiting the holy places, meditating, praying, these are all things that helps us on this journey. This is an alternative to the exploitive way of life toward the plane of devotion. Yet these activities give joy to the devotees also.”

Next is *bhajana kriya* - doing things of devotional nature, not just taking everything cheaply but recognizing the beauty, the sacredness of everything that we do and of everything in the environment. Already here you are having a higher vision in a more pleasant existence as you can see everything in that way, rather than seeing them from a cheaper point-of-view where everything is there for ‘my benefit, for me to exploit.’ Everything is sacred, filled with divine potency and it should be used in that mood for the divine, then automatically we are elevated by interacting with such things.”

“Is *vairagya* a pre-requisite for devotion?” Revant Prabhu asked. “*Vairagya* comes automatically with devotion. It’s complete detachment from all forms of material desire,” Sripad Puri Maharaj responded. “So, is the idea to transcend the desire to fulfill it or to suppress it?” Revant Prabhu’s followed-up with. “The idea is to get the higher taste of devotion. When that higher taste comes, the desire for exploitation will be withdrawn automatically. Desire means sense gratification, so if we can find that thing which is giving us pleasure of a devotional nature, once we get that higher taste we wouldn’t go to those lower things. Automatically we will renounce the lower things. Once we taste Krishna *prasadam*, for instance, we will not want to eat unofferable hamburgers, pizzas, and so on. Automatically we will renounce that kind of food because we find so much more pleasure in doing things of devotional nature than those of exploitation.”

“*Vairagya* always comes with *yukta*. That path is called *yukta-vairagya*, which means we connect with what is higher, get the higher taste and automatically the lower taste is renounced, otherwise it is not possible to successfully become renounced by just *vairagya*. By withdrawing from the sense objects, the desire still remains in us because the things that is driving us is desire and until we know how to root out selfish desire

through surrender to Guru and Krishna we will always be drawn to that thing we are trying to renounce,” Sripad Puri Maharaj continued. “What you are running away from will always remain tied to you like a tin can on a string. Instead of forgetting about it entirely you are running away from it, so it will always follow you. *Yukta-vairagya* is what we want to practice, which is giving up the lower by cultivating the higher taste.”

“*Anartha Nivrtti* explains that there are unwanted, undesirable things in us that don’t lead to higher joy or pleasure. We want to give them up by the processes of association with the devotees, surrender, and engaging in devotional activities. These processes have the effect of purifying those unwanted desires. It may take some time to do that. Even a devotee may still have many undesirable things within one’s self, but a devotee will know that they are undesirable and therefore will try to uproot them,” Sripad Puri Maharaj explained. “By having faith, and good strong association we can give up those things. The higher devotees will engage us in service, in some spiritually fulfilling way that will uproot the unfavorable things that are giving us trouble in our hearts.”

“*Nistha* is the next step, the plane of steadiness. Undesireable attachment to the material world of exploitation will recede. We will reach a plane of satisfaction in engaging only in spiritual activities. Mahaprabhu and the great *acharyas* have given the process to us. If only we give ourselves a chance to take it up, we will see the results. It is not impossible. It is meant for the masses of people to practice *bhakti yoga* (devotional path) so they can become fixed in spiritual life so much that they don’t want to go back to material engagement,” Sripad Puri Maharaj continued.

“Devotion will have to be developed continuously. Rising to the spiritual plane is not always easy but with faith and dedication we will develop higher symptoms of devotion but that requires more and more surrender. The price we have to pay for the higher platform is more surrender, more dedication. That means more purification of our non-devotional, non-surrendered attitude. We will have to overcome that somehow and that will come with the help of the higher devotees or the Lord Himself will arrange for us to meet those who can help us make progress into further depths of devotion. We can get some help from the higher devotees. We want to purify ourselves for service as much as possible in this life and hopefully in the next life we will continue. Even if it takes millions of lifetimes as long as we have that service connection we are happy.”

“When you feel some *ruci* (taste), then you don’t go back?” Rasaraja das Prabhu asked. “You can go back even from *ruci*,” Sripad Puri Maharaj responded. “What causes us to go back?” Revant Prabhu asked. “If we commit some offense,” Sripad Puri Maharaj responded. “Does that mean we have to go back to square one?” Revant Prabhu followed-up. “Whatever progress you make, there’s some development of consciousness there so even if you fall down from that point, because you have developed that consciousness, it will always be there in your heart and if the opportunity comes and you have that chance to purify that offense, then you can reach that plane again very quickly. Once it’s there in your heart it can never be entirely lost to you.”

After this point, Sanga continued on several other topics between Sripad Puri Maharaj, Rasaraja das Prabhu, Amit ji and Revant Prabhu.



(L to R) Revant, Amitji, Spd. Puri Maharaja, Spd. Rasaraja Prabhu

Prasadam was served and honored by all.

Srila Bhakti Nirmal Acharya Maharaja ki jai
Sripad Bhakti Madhava Puri Maharaj ki jai

Your humble servant
Kushum devi dasi

[1] Srila Bhakti Raksak Sridhar Dev-Goswami Maharaj - Founder-President-Acharya: Sri Chaitanya Saraswat Math

[2] A day of Lord Brahmā lasts for one thousand chatur- yugas* and his night is of the same duration. Persons who know this have the true conception of day and night. One yuga {age} in the time calculation of the demigods equals the four yugas or one chatur-yuga in the time calculation of man, or 4,320,000 years.

[3] <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sanat Kumara>

[4] <http://www.vedabase.com/en/cc/madhya/23/14-15>

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