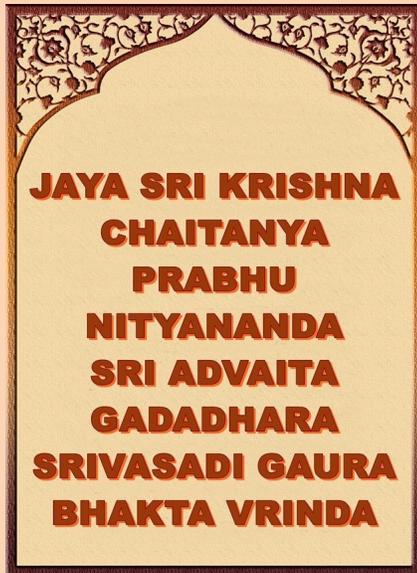
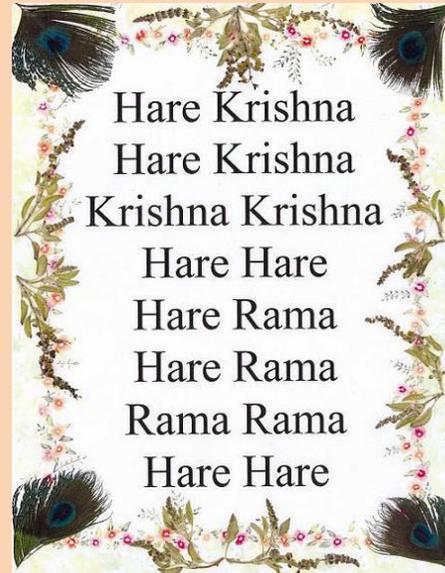


Sri Sri Guru Gaurangau Jayatah
Bhakti Vedanta Institute
Princeton University Harinama
Princeton, NJ
November 8, 2014

“Bring someone back for Sanga,” Sripad Bhakti Madhava Puri Maharaj, Ph.D (Sripad Puri Maharaj) said as we stepped out for Harinam at Princeton University’s campus. Since hardly anyone seemed to be on the campus grounds, we decided to canvas at Princeton’s Palmer Square Park. Rasaraja das Prabhu on kartals (hand cymbal) began with the Panca Tattva mantra followed by the Maha Mantra while I intermittently distributed our brochure.



Panca Tattva mantra



The Maha Mantra

Several passers-by took brochures and kept on going, then came a gentleman (Will). He smilingly took a brochure and also went on his merry way. About two minutes later he returned and asked if he could join us in Harinam. On the brochure he had earlier taken I wrote out the Mahamantra so he could follow Rasaraj das Prabhu’s lead while chanting. About ten minutes later, another couple, (Sandeep and Prachi) who had also earlier taken the brochure approached us again. They wanted us to assist them in locating the Bhakti Vedanta Institute (BVI) office as they wanted to visit for a few minutes while waiting to pick up their daughter from school.

Since we had been out on Harinam for awhile, we decided to “bring” to Sripad Puri Maharaj his three new guests. Back at the BVI office a casual conversation ensued on the philosophy, teachings and purpose of our mission at Princeton University. “Do you have discourses here like Vedanta,” Prachi asked. “Yes, we also have discussions on the Srimad Bhagavat Gita, Srimad Bhagavatam and several other books that are written by our acharyas,” Sripad Puri Maharaj responded. “We also have kirtan, so you can come

and chant with us every Saturday.” “From 2 pm to 4 pm, right?,” Sandeep asked. “Yes.” Sripad Puri Maharaj confirmed. After that brief conversation and some *prasadam*, Sandeep and Prachi left to pick up their daughter but said that they will come again once their parents go back to India the following weekend. Will, who became attracted to the rhythm of Harinam’s Maha Mantra on Halloween night in downtown New York, remained for the rest of the program. “I saw there was a group of Hare Krishna’s chanting and playing instruments. I just joined them and started singing also. It was so much fun,” Will said. Do you know how to play any of those instruments? Sripad Puri Maharaj asked. Will, a professional juggler and street performer, responded that he knows how to play several musical instruments which were mainly self-taught.

Have you heard of George Harrison? Sripad Puri Maharaj asked as he handed Will a written copy of the Maha Mantra. “I do remember his songs,” Will responded. “He was a very devout soul. There is a special day to remember him in several Mandirs (temples). He donated to the devotees a building in London.^[1] He was a very special person. When our gurudev heard his name – George Harrison – he said Hari is the name of Krishna, so his name is Hari’s son, the son of Hari,” Sripad Puri Maharaj said. “He (George Harrison) used to tell people to chant the holy names of Krishna. He was not shy about chanting or telling people to chant the names of God.”

“What is the meaning of Hare Rama” Will asked? “Rama is the pleasure potency of Krishna. When we connect with Krishna, there’s a certain spiritual pleasure that is associated with that connection. It’s a pleasure that is not like any other type of pleasure we have in this world, it’s a spiritual pleasure. So Rama is referring to that pleasure potency of the Lord,” Sripad Puri Maharaj answered. What is Krishna? was Will’s followed-up question. “Krishna is the name of the Absolute Truth Personality of Godhead. It is the name of God and it means all-attractive. Whoever focuses their attention on Krishna they will find that they are becoming more and more attracted,” Sripad Puri Maharaj responded. “We meditate on Krishna, His energy - which is Hara, or Radha, and Rama - His pleasure potency, Their loving relation.”

“Hara” is the energy of the Lord. We understand God to be both male and female. Hara is the female potency of the Lord and Krishna is the male potent. There’s no such thing as energy on its own. There has to be a place where that energy can be generated, so Krishna is like the generator and Hara is that energy that is being generated. The energy is dependent on and serves the source of the energy. In that service of the energy to the Lord, there’s also a reciprocation of relationship that develops and that is Rama. So the whole mantra together means, ‘we are meditating on that which is drawing us into that world of dedication, devotion and love,’” Sripad Puri Maharaj explained. “We call it love when we have dedication and devotion to someone. The highest pleasure we can experience anywhere is not ordinary but divine love, the most supreme feeling we can find in our existence - Love of God. The Maha Mantra has that very powerful, purifying influence on us because it draws our hearts to that higher world of love.”

Pointing to the brochure Will had received earlier, Sripad Puri Maharaj said, “We have that brochure that says ‘Inner Fulfillment’ but that inner fulfillment is through higher

love. Everyone is looking for love but they don't know where that fulfillment is found in its most perfect form. That satisfaction comes only through divine connection." Sripad Puri Maharaj continued. After a brief pause, he said, "Somehow or the other we've been blocked from understanding that higher reality by so many other diversions. Vainly seeking that fulfillment in so many other unsatisfactory ways they don't realize what they are madly running after. People want education, but what is it they want to be educated about? What is that knowledge? And what will they do with it when ultimately everyone is going to die?" Sripad Puri Maharaj asked. "Whatever we are going to do in this world is going to lead to death. Each of these things we are running after in this world is tinged with cyanide poison. Would you willingly take it?" Sripad Puri Maharaj said in his conversation with Will. "I dropped out of college for this very reason," Will said. "I thought through what you are saying on my own and said 'wait a minute' let me stop and try to connect with the divine."

"We have an immortal life and existence otherwise why are we afraid to die? Knowingly no one will accept death. We have an instinct to live, but where is that instinct coming from if ultimately we are going to die? Why do we want to live?" Sripad Puri Maharaj asked. "So that other people can live after us," Will responded. Laughingly Sripad Puri Maharaj said, "We also want to live because we are eternal. This desire to live is coming from the eternal plane. There are three things that define our original nature Sat-Chit-Ananda (eternity, knowledge, bliss). We want to have knowledge because, although we are born in ignorance, our original nature is to know. We want to know what is going on so we go to college. But why is that learning instinct in us?" Sripad Puri Maharaj asked then responded. "Because our true nature is called cit (fully cognitive). We are fully conscious. In addition, we want to live, to go on, why?" In response Will said, "We come from a tradition of people who wanted to live. It's probably due to the first people?"

"Where did the first people get that instinct from?" Sripad Puri Maharaj asked. "Everyone is originally Sat-Chit-Ananda by constitution. That is our original nature that is showing itself in this imperfect form because this material form is only going to lead to the grave," Sripad Puri Maharaj continued. "Or it can lead to more life," Will objected. "In a general sense, yes. But in a particular sense we also have that eternal life. The point is that anything connected with this mundane plane and this body will meet its end through death. This is called the planet of death, *mrityu lok*. Whatever we do in this sphere of material existence will be ultimately mortal," Sripad Puri Maharaj responded.

"Not necessarily. People don't know what the universe really is, so maybe even if the planet died, in some other place there could be another life-giving planet. I do not know that this universe would not start over. Maybe it will and life would be eternal," Will said. Enjoying the conversation, Sripad Puri Maharaj said, "So we move our mess from one planet to the next," We all laughed. Puri Maharaja then asked "So what about you?" "I don't care about myself personally. I am just resigned to the thought that I will die, but I do connect with what you are saying that we are eternal and connected to everything," Will responded.

“We are part of that eternity and that is an irrevocable connection that we have, but we have to re-discover what is that eternal nature of which we are constituted, so that is what yoga means,” Sripad Puri Maharaj continued. “Yoga means to remove the coverings that are preventing us from knowing that eternal nature that we are part of, our true self. Most people have connection with only the visible, outer portion of the body and by identifying with that, of course, you are going to see differences. But by identifying with the inner part, the *atma* (soul), you will recognize the qualitative spiritual unity. But even in that unity there’s differentiation in the spiritual world, but it is not the kind of differentiation we see here on this mundane plane. That kind of unity and difference in the spiritual world is called *acintya*. *Acintya* means it’s not something for the mind to conceive. It’s something that you are. It is only by withdrawing from that plane and identifying with so many other limited things that we think of ourselves as different from one another and everything else.” In agreement to what Sripad Puri Maharaj was discussing thus far, Will said, “The way that you were speaking clarifies it for me. I also like the idea that the thing that unifies us is beyond thought.”



Sobha and Revant Pranhū



Spd. Puri Maharaj teaches Will how to play kartals

After a very intense scientific discussion, Sripad Puri Maharaj said, “There’s no proof that there’s an external world in science. We merely assume that what we are experiencing is external to us. The most direct experience we have is that we are conscious and that the world around us is exterior to consciousness, but that’s a presumption. Whatever we are experiencing is within. The things that we think are our thoughts, but to think of those things as exterior to our thoughts would be another thought or presupposition,” Sripad Puri Maharaj said.

“There’s a unity to reality and the only reason we are not able to tap into that universality is because we are identifying with the finite, the sub divisions of that oneness. The more we identify with those sub-categories, the less we have connection with the higher unity that is a unity-in-difference,” Sripad Puri Maharaj continued. “There a flip side to this. I have met someone who does not believe this,” Will said. “It’s not a matter of belief, it’s a matter of knowledge,” Sripad Puri Maharaj responded. “Someone may not believe you can calculate the spectrum of a molecule using quantum mechanics, but by learning that knowledge you can also do it yourself.”

“Why are there so many schools? Why do we go to school?” Sripad Puri Maharaj asked. “Because we are constant learners, Sobha responded. “We may be learners but why do we go to the teachers at school, the gurus?” Sripad Puri Maharaj sharpens his question. After a brief pause he said, “Because whoever has some knowledge they can teach it to us. We can learn things very easily when we hear from a learned person. That is also a process of revelation – knowledge that is given to us. It’s not something we’ve developed on our own. We learn things from our parents, teachers, and so on. Revelation or hearing from a higher authority, (author means one who can expand our experience) is an important way we receive knowledge and learn how to understand things from that higher platform. So revelation is a very important process for an individual and human society as a whole to make progress. A process of learning about even history, what to speak of the higher things we don’t know, is through revelation from others, and that is the only way we can actually learn about those things.”

“We can also learn by experience, and that is very important, but that is also a very limited and slow process, and we miss the opportunity to learn others’ knowledge. Its only if we open ourselves up and allow that knowledge that we don’t know to come into our lives, then we can also learn how that might be experienced. It is a very important part of spiritual life not to think that we know everything. Only by understanding we are limited and finite can we have any realization of the Infinite Spirit of which we are part. That will help us to be humble and appreciative of the grace of Spirit which is the real truth of everything that is, and to Krishna, the source of all sweetness, Who attracts those who dedicate themselves in service to Him, and whom he also pleases by such relation.

“This mind diverts us into so many different directions, so meditation is good for the mind - it focuses the mind. People are led by their minds into so many different directions. so to practice mental control is a good practice, especially if you can focus your mind on Krishna, on God. That’s the main thing,” Sripad Puri Maharaj continued. “Focusing the mind brings a certain amount of peace to a person but that is not the ultimate goal. You can die peacefully or agitatedly, either way, we are still going to die. So meditation on how to make progress toward the eternal world, that’s what we want to try to understand and to achieve. It’s not really an achievement in one sense, its not something that you go after and you get. Rather this is something that you are and you only have to remove the obstacles to that which you already are. That is what we do, which is called Bhakti Yoga (devotional union with the Divine). The whole system of yoga is based on removing the obstacles that are preventing our connection with, or our consciousness of God.” “What do you do to practice that?” Will asked. “Bhakti yoga is a whole way of life that has to be practiced, just as we are doing. ” Sripad Puri Maharaja answered.

Will wanted to know if he has to sing what we are singing or if he can sing anything at random? “Is it not better to sing freely?”

“What we sing are the names of God. In this way the song, the voice, the attention, these are all focused on the eternal and not on the mortal. So that is why we glorify the names of God. The names of God are very powerful sounds; they are not ordinary songs or

names,” Sripad Puri Maharaj responded. “If I were down the street and I said ‘Will,’ you are here, so you would not be there in your name. But when you sing the names of Krishna, He is present in His name. The name is Absolute. It’s the nature of the absolute world that everything is one and different simultaneously. So by chanting His names we are invoking the energy of the Lord and the Lord Himself. Not that we are calling Him down to us, but He comes to us by chanting the Name. Chanting the Name is not something anyone can do. Whoever can chant the Name, they already have the mercy of Krishna. It’s not something we can do with our lips and tongue because, just as a blade of grass cannot move without the Lord’s will, only by His grace can we chant His Name. We think we have some freedom here to do what we want, but that’s not a fact. Everything here is impelled by something else – cause and effect. This is called the casual plane. Everything is caused by something but whoever chants the names of Krishna, the Name Itself is giving permission to be chanted by you. It’s a very special thing, not everyone can do it.”

In revealing the power of Sri Krishna’s name, Sripad Puri Maharaj said, “We are out on the streets chanting, and there are some people who think we are ridiculous and they would never say the Name except to say ‘oh, those Hare Krishnas.’ Unknowing, they say Krishna’s name. Even that is an auspicious thing but if they were to say ‘oh those crazy people’ then they don’t get any benefit,” Sripad Puri Maharaj explained. “Krishna’s Name can only be chanted by those to whom Krishna gives the ability. The more we can understand that, the more we can get the full mercy of the Name. The Name comes to us, not that we can control it. Everything in that spiritual world is above us, as I was explaining, the energy and the energetic source. We are the energy. We are dependent on the source - even our minds, our wills, they are all fully dependent.”

Have you heard about Karma? Sripad Puri Maharaj asked. “Whatever you’ve done in the past is coming to take its toll on you. We may think we plan our lives but actually our lives have been planned.” Whose plan is that?” “Is it God’s plan?” Sobha asked. “Yes. He (Krishna) has a plan for everyone,” Sripad Puri Maharaj replied. “We think we are planning our lives but it doesn’t work that way. What we are planning doesn’t come out. In fact, whatever you are planning you can be sure it won’t come out. You’ve heard the saying - ‘the best laid plans of mice and men.’”

“Then what should we do? Should we not make plans for our future at all?” Sobha further inquired. “If we surrender and put our lives in the hands of Krishna’s plan, that will be the best plan. Whatever we do that brings us closer to Krishna will be a good plan by His grace,” Sripad Puri Maharaj responded. “We just have to understand Who’s in-charge and it’s not us.”

After this point, Sanga continued on a more scientific level between Sripad Puri Maharaj, Will and Revant Prabhu.



L to R: Rasaraja das Prabhu, Guests: Will, Prachi and Sandeep with Sripad Puri Maharaj

Prasadam was served and honored by all.

All Glories to Sri Guru and Sri Sri Gauranga
Srila Bhakti Nirmal Acharya Maharaja ki jai
Sripad Bhakti Madhava Puri Maharaj ki jai

Your humble servant
Kushum devi dasi

[¹] Bhaktivedanta Manor (London) - <http://www.bhaktivedantamanor.co.uk/home/>

Donations

<https://ipn.intuit.com/pay/BhaktivedantaInstitute>