

Sri Sri Guru Gaurangau Jayatah
Bhakti Vedanta Institute
Princeton University Harinama
Princeton, NJ
February 28, 2015

After our long winter hibernation the New York devotees braved the cold weather and journeyed out to our Princeton Bhakti Vedanta Institute Center for Harinam. Rasaraja das Prabhu on kartals, Syamasundara das Prabhu on guitar opened Harinam, followed by Sripad Bhakti Madhava Puri Maharaj, Ph.D (Sripad Puri Maharaj) rendition of the Maha Mantra. Several guests: Ralph, Ved ji, Dorothy, Revant Prabhu and Sobha ji joined us in a most joyous Harinama Sankirtana.



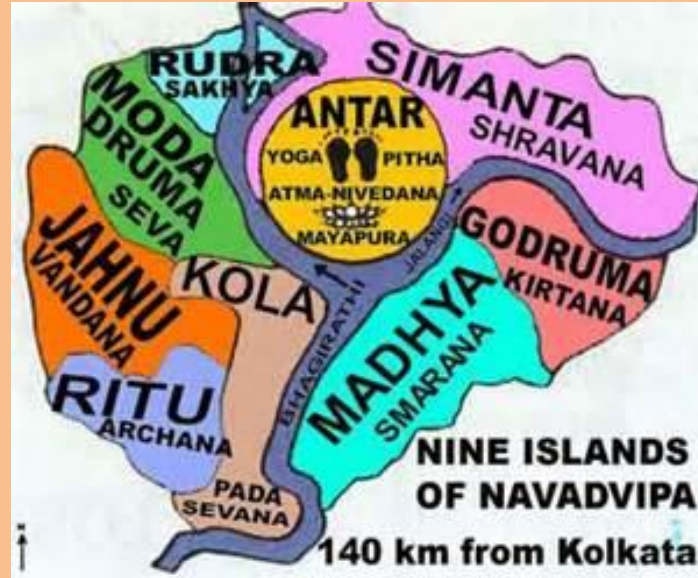
Syamasundara das Prabhu on guitar



Rasaraja das Prabhu on kartals



Beginning the *sanga* discussion, Sripad Puri Maharaj briefly explained the significance of *parikram*, in this case through a narrative journey around the nine islands of Sri Navadvip Dham.



Sripad Puri Maharaj explained that the nine islands/regions of Navadvip Dham appear like a lotus with eight petals surrounding the central whorl, called Antardwip. *Parikrama* represents the journey through the nine processes of bhakti (devotion) set forth by Sri Prahlāda Mahārāja. Simantadvip represents *Sravanam* which means hearing about the Supreme Lord’s transcendental names, pastimes, and so on. The next is Godrumadvip that represents *Kirtana*, the chanting of the Lord’s holy names. Next is Madhyadvip, representing *Smaranam*, remembering what you have heard about the Lord. In *Koladvip*, Sri Chaitanya Saraswat Math is located there and it’s *Pada Sevanam*, serving at the lotus feet of the Lord. *Ritadvip* represents *archana* (worship) at the Lotus Feet of the Lord. *Jahnavadvip* is *vandana*, offering prayers to the Lord. In *Modadrumadvip*, it’s *seva* or *dasya rasa* (service mood) then in *Rudradvip* is *sakhya rasa* (considering the Lord as one’s best friend), then you come upon Antardvip where we find the *yoga-pitha* (the birth-place of Sri Chaitanya Mahaprabh^[1]) in Mayapur, representing *atma nivedana* (self surrender). The Lord appear to those who surrender themselves completely to Him.

Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam 7.5.23-24 states the nine devotional processes set forth by Sri Prahlāda Mahārāja.

śrī-prahrāda uvāca

śravaṇam kīrtanam viṣṇoḥ
smaraṇam pāda-sevanam

*arcanaṁ vandanāṁ dāsyāṁ
sakhyam ātma-nivedanam*

*iti puṁsārpitā viṣṇau
bhaktiś cen nava-lakṣaṇā
kriyeta bhagavaty addhā
tan manye 'dhītam uttamam*

“Prahāda Mahārāja said: Hearing and chanting about the transcendental holy name, form, qualities, paraphernalia and pastimes of Lord Viṣṇu, remembering them, serving the lotus feet of the Lord, offering the Lord respectful worship with sixteen types of paraphernalia, offering prayers to the Lord, becoming His servant, considering the Lord one’s best friend, and surrendering everything unto Him (in other words, serving Him with the body, mind and words) – these nine processes are accepted as pure devotional service. One who has dedicated his life to the service of Kṛṣṇa through these nine methods should be understood to be the most learned person, for he has acquired complete knowledge.”

“The significant pastimes of Lord Chaitanya in each of the nine islands are explained in the book *Sri Navadvīp Mahatmya*,” Sripad Puri Maharaj said then asked if we had read it. Rasaraja das Prabhu said he has read it while Syamasundara das Prabhu and I said we have not read it. “Is Koldvip the place where Chaitanya Mahaprabhu shows mercy to Jagai and Madai?” Rasaraja das Prabhu asked. “Yes” Sripad Puri Maharaj responded. And the palce where Sri Chaitanya Saraswat Math is located is called *aparadha byanjan path*, where Lord Nityananda forgave the offensive behavior of Jagai and Madhai. “Every island has a specific significance in relation to the pastimes there.”

In explaining to his several new guests, Sripad Puri Maharaj said, “We were chanting this mantra – *Hare Krishna Hare Krishna Krishna Krishna Hare Hare / Hare Rama Hare Rama Rama Rama Hare Hare* - this is called the *Mahamantra* (great mantra), with instruments to release the mind from it’s ordinary mundane engagements that is always troublesome and helps to focus us on the true self which is transcendental to this world,” Sripad Puri Maharaj explained. “We are all spiritual by nature, not material.”

“The body is made up of matter but the soul is what gives life to the body. When you have a body but the life’s energy is missing, the body doesn’t work. That body is now considered as dead, no life in it. The consciousness is not there, so consciousness is the symptom of the soul. That soul is spiritual, in Sanskrit it is called *Brahman* (spirit),” Sripad Puri Maharaj continued. “By original constitution every soul is a member of Brahmālok, the spiritual plane. We lose focus of our original spiritual nature, however, when we are in the material atmosphere.

There our attention is always directed outward to everything else but the inner spirit self. We've become enamored by the outward things and become lost to our real identity. We are always feeling unhappy and unsatisfied in that condition. We are looking for 'how can I be happy, how I can get some pleasure.' We are always looking at different avenues to achieve this through all the material activities of this world."

What are we really searching for? What is driving all of that desire and search? Sripad Puri Maharaj asked his attentive audience. "If we knew what that was we would not be enamored by so many different material activities, instead we would concentrate on that activity which will be genuinely pleasing to the self."



Part of the audience during *sanga* with Sripad Puri Maharaj

"Meditation, as we are doing, involves chanting mantras, They have their own spiritual potencies. If we chant them collectively we find that it becomes very easy and helpful for us to become absorbed in that chanting. By chanting together harmoniously we are able to focus our attention on the inner world of spirit and as we do that, we're becoming more and more purified by that process where we find that we can enter into that spiritual domain much more easily and can leave behind the things that are distracting us from that plane. In that mood, we find out what exactly that plane has to offer and what service we have to offer. That is the process of meditation," Sripad Puri Maharaj explained. "What we are chanting are the names of God - *Hare, Krishna* and *Rama*."

"*Hare* is God? Dorothy asked. "God is One but He shows Himself in different ways according to the different angles of vision of His devotees who are meditating upon Him. He has so many different names and in Sanskrit, there are thousands of names," Sripad Puri Maharaj responded smilingly. "He is the same Supreme Lord but people worship Him by many different names."

"*Hare* represents the female potency, (*shakti*) energy of the Lord. Krishna is the source of that energy, the male potency. Whenever we speak of energy, it also

has an origin, a source and that source of energy, the *Shaktiman*, is Krishna,” Sripad Puri Maharaj continued. “*Rama* is the pleasure potency of Krishna. When one meditates on God, one experiences *ananda* (ecstasy) because that joy we are searching for can be found at that higher plane of divine love of God, Krishna *prema*. We can find an uninterrupted flow of ecstasy. *Ananda* means an unlimited flow of joy.”

“We find these things explained in the *sastras* (scriptures) but can we experience them? Sripad Puri Maharaj asked then responded, “The only way we can find out, is if, we actually try for that. To taste our true spiritual nature, we have to make the effort to enter into that experience, only then we can understand what it is. The processes of yoga, meditation and other things that we do, they are all meant to bring us that taste in the higher realm. This is what Vedanta teaches. This is what we teach here at the Bhakti Vedanta Institute (BVI),” Sripad Puri Maharaj continued. “*Vedanta* is made up of two words - *Ved* and *Anta*. *Ved* means knowledge and *Anta* means the end, essence or the goal of knowledge. Everyone is seeking knowledge, but what is that knowledge? Sripad Puri Maharaj asked then responded, “We could be searching for knowledge endlessly. There are so many books in the library and people are writing them constantly, they are ever increasing.”

He then made reference to the book entitled *Future Shock* - “They are increasing knowledge so much that there will come a point, which is probably already here, that we can’t possibly study, learn or absorb all that knowledge and it’s increasing unlimitedly.” Why do we have such an intense desire for knowledge? He followed-up with. “*Vedanta* says there’s a goal in knowledge, there’s an end of knowledge. What your knowing capacity, your desire for knowing is meant for that’s what *Vedanta* teaches, otherwise you will be going through all the knowledge you can consume but it will never come to an end. How to satisfy that desire for knowledge? That is called *Vedanta*. That is what we try to teach and understand,” Sripad Puri Maharaj continued. “Searching for knowledge on its own is not an end in itself. There’s an end of knowledge but there’s also another aspect besides knowing and that is love (Krishna *prema*). Love is the end of knowledge. The end of knowledge is not simply knowledge itself but the love, devotion, dedication that we have for Krishna, the unlimited reservoir of all love, pleasure, joy, beauty. That kind of love would be the only love that would satisfy us to the maximum.”

“*Veda* (knowledge) tells us that love can be found in Krishna, the reservoir of pleasure, and Radha (Hara) is the energy of His pleasure. If we study who Hara (Radha) is, what is Her nature, we find a very clear understanding of that aspect of God that She represents. In Sanskrit the word Radha means *aradhana* (to worship, serve, dedicate oneself fully),” Sripad Puri Maharaj explained. “When

we love, that manifest in us as devotion, dedication. We give our whole mind, heart, our soul or whatever we have, we are dedicating that to the one we love. She gives Herself fully for the service and satisfaction of Krishna. We are also of the nature of energy. We are the finite energy of God. Each one of us has a spark of God in us. To keep that spark alive, we have to make that connection of (bhakti) devotion and dedication to Krishna and that spark will become very bright, very enlightened. The more we neglect that function of our soul and try to engage in other activities besides devotion and dedication, the more we will find that sparkle dim. We might not even know it is there anymore. We have become so totally immersed in material activities that we totally misconceive our true spiritual self as just a bag of interacting chemicals.”

“In the human form of life, there’s something called religion (*dharma*) which is not found among any other living creatures and that *dharma* is meant for the purpose of not getting so lost in material activities that the spark of our soul, our spiritual existence becomes practically extinguished. Of course it cannot become extinguished, even if we become absorbed in bodily existence, because it’s eternal,” Sripad Puri Maharaj continued. “The soul is always active but we don’t remember, we are not conscious of that. We have not cultivated our awareness of that plane of our existence. How that can be cultivated, nourished and developed has to be learned and therefore the process of *bhakti-yoga* is given. There are certain things that we do that help to maintain the development, awareness of the consciousness of our spiritual identity. For those who have *sukriti* (pious quality, good merit) developed within them, they take up that process and they don’t engage so much in worldly activities, sense gratification or even mental speculation. These things can drive us indefinitely in different directions looking for satisfaction that would never be fulfilled, but some come to a point in their lives by previous pious activities that they are able to understand that there’s something higher. They want to understand *Vedanta*, Bhakti Vedanta and practice yoga, meditation, and to hear different talks about spiritual life and different processes of spiritual culture.

Delving right into the purpose of *parikrama*, Sripad Puri Maharaj said, “There’s one avatar (incarnation) of Krishna who appeared in the world a little over five hundred (500) years ago in West Bengal, India. His name is Sri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu. His appearance day is next week. In preparing for His appearance, in India the devotees begin with a *parikrama* (pilgrimage) to the different places where He performed His pastimes. That area is called Navadvip in West Bengal, India. We want to discuss how the devotees who are there visited the different places of pilgrimage where He performed His pastimes and meditate on that because that helps us to gain some knowledge about the spiritual practices that we also have to perform ourselves. “

At this point of *sanga* Sripad Puri Maharaj took us on a narrative *praikrama* of Navadvip dham as reported above. He opened up an online map and began describing the nine sections and their devotional representations. Pointing to the center, he said, "This whole area is in the shape of a lotus. A lotus has petals all around it and in the middle it has a yellow platform. That center is called *Antardvip* (inner) and around it are the different islands/regions where the Lord performed His pastimes over five hundred (500) years ago. In *Antardvip*, there's Mayapur where Sri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu appeared. There's a large mandir (temple) there that has His foot prints and is called *yoga-pitha*, and there is a neem tree which is the place where He was born.



Viewing the online map of Sri Navadvip dham with Sripad Puri Maharaj

Simantadvip, *sravana* (hearing): The very first introduction we have to some place we have never been to before is by hearing about it. **Godrumadvipa (*kirtan*).** Kirtana means speaking about it or chanting. If you hear about something then you can talk about it. In Madhyadvipa it's remembering, *smaranam*. After you heard about it, talked about it, you can remember something about it. **Koladvipa (*pada sevnam*):** service to the lotus feet of the Lord. It's a very humble form of service. **Rtudvipa (*archanam*):** worshipping Krishna. Sometimes you go to an Indian (Hindu) temple or Christian Church and you see the priest offering different things like incense, flowers, bread and so on, so in the temples also, the devotees offer different items such as incense, lamp, peacock fan, flowers, and even tons of food. The devotees then offer the food to the people as the Lord's mercy (*prasadam*)," **Jahnudvipa (*vandana*):** which means offering prayers, not the type where you are asking God to give us everything, but to give praise to the Lord. Praise is the actual meaning of prayer from the heart, not from the calculative mind. Praising, giving glory to the Lord and acknowledging His presence in your life in a glorious way, in a God-centered way, not a self centered way."

Modadrumadvipa (*seva/dasya*): Actual engagement in the service of the Lord through His devotee is called *seva*. Just like the mission that we have here, it's meant for the service of the Lord. We come here, hold classes, distribute

literature and sacred food (*prasadam*), which we first offer to the Lord and our Gurudev, we have *kirtans* and invite others to join us to hear about spiritual life -- and it's all done as a matter of service to the *acharyas* (spiritual teacher). They are giving us this knowledge and we are serving them to maintain the Math (spiritual institution where the *acharya* lives). So many services we can do like cleaning the temple, cooking, farming, collecting donations and so many various other activities of the *Math*. There's a whole process in *dasya rasa* that the devotees are engaged in, both mentally and physically, in the service of Krishna," Sripad Puri Maharaj continued. **Rudradvipa (*sakhya raas*):** In relating to Krishna in the mood of service, it is possible that it may develop to a more intense and sweet nature, so that an intimacy develops of such high quality that we feel ourselves, by the mercy of Guru and Krishna, to be in a friendly relationship with Krishna."

How can Krishna, Who is superior to us, be our friend? Ved ji asked? "In the Vaikuntha conception of Narayan or Visnu, it is not possible, because we think of God in the mood of awe and reverence. But in the Vrindavan conception of Braja Krishna there are two (2) levels. In one the Lord is of superior nature and in the other, His devotee is superior to Him and He looks to him for his help. Devotees have such relationship with Krishna that He looks to them as His confidants. It's a quality of the heart and if that consciousness develops to such an extent, it is possible that Krishna also relates to His devotees as His friends. It's not that Krishna is impersonal. He is personal," Sripad Puri Maharaj responded. "There's even another stage, *Vatsalya*, where you can be the parents of Krishna. It's difficult to understand because we are not brought up in that kind of culture/tradition but in the Vedic culture, the dealings of the heart, at the higher transcendental level, these things are possible but we have to be on that plane. **Antardvip, (*atma nivedana*):** When you can give your whole heart, body, mind, soul, everything to Krishna and He can do whatever He wants with you, this is the highest plane of love. When you are totally surrendered to the satisfaction of the Lord through his representative, Gurudeva, and you have no other shelter and you are not looking for any self interest in your relationship, that is the highest point of attainment through *bhakti*. It's called Krishna *prema* (Love of Krishna)."

In concluding our narrational *parikrama*, Sripad Puri Maharaj said, "the devotees meditate on all these things. The whole scientific process of Krishna consciousness is represented in that *parikrama*. When we go to these different places, there are different stories told of how each of these processes of *bhakti* (devotional services) are manifested there by different pastimes of the Lord and His devotees that manifested there over 500 years ago when Chaitanya Mahaprabhu was there and walking in that area. It helps to bring the real

devotees to a very intense focus on these things so they can understand where they are at and where they have to go to make spiritual progress in their lives.”

Surrender physically or what? Ved ji asked? “Yes, everything, we don’t think of physical. In that *parikrama* your body automatically goes where your heart is,” Sripad Puri Maharaj responded. What about thinking? Ved ji follow-up with. “Thinking is not a problem there. You are going from your genuine self, acting from the plane of your real identity,” Sripad Puri Maharaj continued. “Our position is, we are dependent not independent if we think about it and yet we are going around thinking we are independent. We have freedom but our dependence is also there. God is a necessity for our existence. We have the freedom to remember or forget and forgetfulness of God is called *maya*, illusion. In the illusion of independence, or Godless existence, we believe that God is unnecessary.”

“*Maya* conjoins two words, *Ma*, *Ya*. *Ya* means ‘that’ and *Ma* means ‘not.’ ‘That’ means God and ‘Ma’ means ‘not God.’ So in *maya* we are living in the consciousness of not-God but in the plane of truth, *vasudevah sarvam iti*, God is the truth. The *Vedanta*, the ultimate conclusion of all knowledge, states that there is God, Krishna, the Supreme Personality of Godhead, and He is the source of everything and we have our relationships with Him eternally and spiritually. It is not something that is forced upon us but something that is beautiful, liberating and joyful,” Sripad Puri Maharaj said.

Srila Bhakti Raksaka Sridhara Maharaj’s *Bhagavad Gita - The Hidden Treasure of the Sweet Absolute*: 7.19 states:

*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.”

So these books can only capture a small amount of Krishna pastimes? Revant Prabhu asked. “Yes, we have finite minds so we can only know a finite portion about what God is but the heart knows a lot more than what the mind can reveal, therefore we really put the emphasis on *bhakti*,” Sripad Puri Maharaj responded. “We are really looking for the heart connection.” “I remember Srila Guru Maharaj said that ‘love is more powerful than intellect.’ It is by love you can

control the Supreme not by your intellect,” Rasaraja das Prabhu said. “Yes, Prabhu. By love you can conquer God.” Sripad Puri Maharaj said.



L to R; back row: Revant Prabhu, Guest, Ralph with Prabhus: Rasaraja and Syamasundara das. Front row: Guests: Dorothy, Ved ji with Sripad Puri Maharaj

At this point of *sanga*, our glorious visual Navadvip Dham parikrama came to end. 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
(New York)

[1] Sri Krishna Chaitanya Mahaprabhu appeared in in Mayapur, West Bengal, India in 1486. Although He is the Supreme Lord Himself, Sri Krishna, He posed as a devotee, and revealed the most sublime sentiments and the natural disposition of a devotee. He taught us by His own example how to establish a connection with the Lord through the practice of pure devotion. Srila Rupa Goswami has glorified Lord Chaitanya as being the most munificent Lord because He freely distributed pure love of Godhead.

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