

Sri Sri Guru Gaurangau Jayatah
Bhakti Vedanta Institute
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Does Harinam initiation, when compared to Gayatri initiation, hold any value, was the question posed to Sripad Puri Maharaj while we were sitting around him before our regular program began.

“Harinam (the Holy Naam/Name - Name) initiation is the main initiation. This is what opens up our hearts and minds to the plane of *divya jnana* (transcendental knowledge). Initiation is like getting a visa for *divya jnana* or the transcendental service world. Without that initial connection to divine knowledge we remain within the mundane plane of our natural birth, or seminal birth. The second birth (*divya jnana*) is necessary to awaken us to our spiritual nature as eternal servants of Krsna. Until we are born again in the transcendental world, we remain on the mundane platform of knowledge, in the exploitive conception of life,” Sripad Puri Maharaj responded. “Harinam initiation provides us knowledge of the difference between the material and the spiritual worlds, between knowledge that we acquire through our positive empirical experiences and knowledge that descends through the disciplic succession or *parampara*^[1]. That is why it is very important who is our guru. We don’t choose a guru who is coming from a material line, seminal birth or family lineage. We don’t accept that because it is tinged with mundane *jnana*. *Divya jnana* is free from all mundane association. It has no connection to this material plane and that is the only kind of awakening, proper conception, or re-birth that can help us cross beyond the material life of mortality.” *Sri Caitanya Caritamrta: Antya-lila*, 4.192, states:

diksa-kale bhakta kare atma-samarpana
sei kale krsna tare kare atma-sama

"At the time of initiation, when a devotee fully surrenders unto the service of the Lord, Krsna accepts him to be as good as Himself."



Harinam initiation [*ritvic* on behalf of Srila Acharya Maharaja] of Srimati Kushum devi dasi and Sriman Jadhu Krishna das in 2011 at the California Seva Ashram. Srila Janardan Mahahraj explains what it means to take initiation, while Sripad Puri Maharaj witnesses.

“Harinam initiation is most important. The Name is not just a sound. The knowledge of transcendence is the knowledge of devotion, of love for the Supreme. That’s its special quality in the form of what is called the *bhakti lata bheej* (seed of devotional creeper). That seed is needed first (that is Harinam initiation), then that creeper will grow with proper care (that is *sadhana*). A seed that comes from or is mixed with ideas of this world will grow into something mundane but it will never come to the plane of transcendence. It will never develop into love of Krishna. Srila Sridhar Maharaj^[2] told that the line between this world and that is established by *saranagati* (surrender). Without *saranagati*, we will not have any spiritual life. Without the perfect humility of surrender, spiritual life can not even begin.. It will only be an external show of being a devotee,” Sripad Puri Maharaj continued.

“Some claim that the second (Gayatri) initiation is the real initiation, not Harinam initiation,” Bakula Mataji reiterated the initial query.

“Gayatri (mantra) initiation is to assist Harinam initiation. It is useful to get to Vaikuntha with Gayatri but to get to Vrindavan requires Naam, Krishna’s name. Naam has a wider expanse than Gayatri,” Sripad Puri Maharaj responded. “Srila Guru Maharaj^[2] explained that the Harinam mantra and the Gayatri mantra are like two concentric circles, one inside the other, with Gayatri being inside the Harinam circle. He said the Harinam mantra goes from the lower to the highest but the Gayatri goes only to a certain level. The Gayatri mantra only helps when you have some background in *Nama* initiation but not after that,” Rasaraja das Prabhhu said.

“Everything is relative but if one has Harinam, the highest realization, the Vrindavan realization, then Gayatri can also bring you to a higher plane. Just like Srila Sridhar Maharaj gave his interpretation of Gayatri and what is the ending of that interpretation? Radha dasya!^[3] Those *smarta* brahmins who may chant Gayatri mantra, don’t have that realization of Radha dasya. Their understanding may go up to Sri, which is Lakshmi Narayan in Vaikuntha. Their realization goes only as high as Vaikuntha and without Harinam of the Gaudiya line, which is following in the footsteps of Rupanuga, Rupa Goswami,” Sripad Puri Maharaj said then asked “Who is Rupa Goswami?” In response he said, “Rupa mangari in Krishna’s pastimes.’ You don’t get that anywhere or everywhere. We have to realize the precious jewel that Srila Prabhupada, Srila Sridhar Maharaja, Srila Bhaktisiddhanta Saraswati, and Srila Bhakti Vinod Thakur are giving.”

“*Sri Chaitanya Charitamrita* explains that Harinama initiation is sufficient to take you back to Godhead,” Bakula Mataji said.

“Yes, Krishna’s name is there. However, it’s not just the Name that is important, but the conception by which the Name is uttered. We don’t just say things without knowing what they mean to us. Words don’t just come about without some conception/meaning behind them. So the Name and the conception of Krishna are the main things. To receive the Name from a realized soul is what brings you to the higher conception,” Sripad Puri Maharaj responded then asked “Some are chanting Krishna, Krishna, Krishna but what are they realizing? “They may realize Vasudev Krishna, Who is without Srimati Radharani, the Gopis, without anything. *Vasudevah sarvam iti*. That is Krishna by Himself. Some people meditate only on that Krishna but there is much more than that, such as Krishna in Dwarka, Krishna in Mathura, Krishna in Jagannatha Puri. Like that there are different levels of Krishna consciousness. Raghunath das Goswani was teaching *Radha dasya*. In Vraja, the Gopies don’t think as much about Krishna as they are concerned about Radharani. They are chastising Krishna, ‘why are You so cruel to Radharani?’ They console Radharani, ‘don’t worry about Krishna, He’s a dacoit, debauchee,’” Sripad Puri Maharaj said laughingly.

Rasaraja das Prabhu said. "Srila Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati Thakur and Srila Guru Maharaj were in Radha kunda on one occasion and there was a king going there with his family. The king and his family were prostrating around the Radha kunda giving their obeisances and every time they would prostrate they would put a stone and from there they would drop again, going all the way around Radha kunda like that. One of the disciple said, 'wow they have great devotion for Srimati Radharani because they are doing that type of obeisances' then Srila Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati Thakur said that 'we do the opposite.' The disciple then asked 'how come' and Srila Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati Thakur said 'we have attraction to Krishna because He is related to Srimati Radharani. They are doing that because She is related to Krishna but we are the opposite. We are connecting to Krishna because He has some connection to Srimati Radharani,'"



Part of the audience during *pravachan*

"There are many subtle nuances in spiritual conceptions like the difference between Radhani and Chandravali. Radharani feels that 'Krishna is mine.' Chandravali feels dependence, that 'I am Krishna's. The moods of Radharani and Chandravali are completely opposite. Chandravali is always trying to be the direct servitor of Krishna, whereas Radharani is thinking 'if someone can serve Krishna better let me help them. My only desire is to see that Krishna is happy,' Sripad Puri Maharaj explained. "In the same way there are different subtleties in the Krishna conception as in the Radha conception. All these things we can talk about but then what kind of conception do we have? We think in terms of mundane relationships and that's completely wrong, therefore, *divya jnan* is necessary. *Divya jnan* means to get rid of the material conception. Death to the mundane conception, die to live, develop yourself toward the divine conception based on humility, *saranagti*, self forgetfulness. All these things, to actually do that, to actually feel that, we need to have guru, and to actually chant Hare Krishna, we have to be in the mood of always thinking how can I serve guru. When we are chanting Hare Krishna, we are praying 'please engage me in service.' Since we cannot serve Krishna directly, let me serve gurudeva and the Vaishnavas. Through the mercy and energy of the Lord, somehow we are given the opportunity to serve, and then our life can be utilized properly. We have spent so many millions of lives serving ourself, our family, our country and whatever else we are serving, so one life we can give to the service of Krishna, to guru.' That's initiation when you become inspired to do that and that's the gift of Mahaprabhu^[4] to give Himself to us through guru, to inspire us to develop that kind of unparalleled desire. That's Harinam initiation."



Listening attentively to Sripad Puri Maharaj explaining Harinam and Gayatri initiation

“When Srila Prabhupada was here, Harinam initiation was the most important in ISKCON^[5] but when he left this world some started saying that Gayatri initiation is most important even though I read in *Sri Caitanya Caritamrta* that Harinam initiation is most important,” Surottama das Prabhu said.

“In the Vaisnava tradition, Gayatri was never part of its practice. Srila Bhaktisiddhanta Saraswati Thankur introduced the brahmin thread to our tradition,” Sripad Puri Maharaj responded.

“It’s very hard to understand how people can force things that don’t belong there. I mean, you take first initiation from Srila Prabhupada, then after he left the body, they create and pass laws that you are not his disciple anymore because someone else gave you Gayatri initiation,” Surottama das Prabhu said.

“What this should point out to us, is how important it is to have the pure devotee association because we don’t know so much. I mean, who are we? We are coming from all different backgrounds with so many misconceptions. There are some who take the position of ‘guru’ and they may have very dynamic personalities, and may be very sincere, so what they say is what we know,” Sripad Puri Maharaj said. “However, if you don’t feel it in your heart, the same heart that directed you to spiritual life, then you should doubt whatever you are doing. You have to feel it is right in your heart because if we are not sincere then life will be miserable, but if we are sincere then nothing can harm us. So the main thing is to be sincere, and that means to listen to your heart if you are genuinely looking for spiritual life,” Sripad Puri Maharaj continued.

At this point we reached the time for our regular program to start. We began with Harinam kirtan led by Sripad Puri Maharaj with the Panca Tattva mantra followed by the Maha Mantra, Prabhus: Rasaraja das and Surottama das on kartals, backed by Syamasundara das on guitar began Harinam Sankirtana at Princeton University’s Bhakti Vedanta Institute (BVI) . Matajis, Bakula and Brajaseva with guests: Mahesh, Uma devi and their two children, Akshita and Sai, joined in our very energized Harinam.

Beginning pravachan, Sripad Puri Maharaj said, “Everything objective has some subjective aspect, which is just as important as the objective because the object is only significant to the degree the subject gives to it. Recently a Picasso painting was sold for \$104 million, the biggest amount ever paid for a painting. They paid \$104 million for some oil on canvas, cheap things that maybe cost a few dollars. Why did that object have so much value, when the material itself was not very valuable? Where did that value come from?” Sripad Puri Maharaj asked his attentive audience, then responded, “Subjectivity. The subjective consideration is very powerful to give so much value to things.

“In Germany, they put the Jews in gas chambers and killed them,” Sripad Puri Maharaja said. “Why?” guest Mahesh asked. “Because they thought them (the Jewish people) to be of little or no value or even negative value. They were treated worse than garbage. People can look at things, even people and have such subjective estimations of them. Information is subjective, importance, value, all these things we deal with in ordinary life determine the objective according to our subjective conception,” Sripad Puri Maharaj continued.

“When we chant the Maha Mantra - *Hare Krishna, Hare Krishna, Krishna Krishna, Hare Hare / Hare Rama, Hare Rama, Rama Rama, Hare Hare* - what is our conception of what we are chanting? Why do we give so much value to the Holy Name? So many scriptures (*shastra*) are there to instruct us practically and also give us some philosophical conception. They help to cultivate the subjective quality of value or enlightenment within this world, and to give us some idea of the meaning and purpose of life. Afterall, we don’t just live like ants upon the Earth, going here and there simply for our own preservation. Ants don’t have *shastra*, they may have certain values or priorities but not like human beings. We give intense value to certain things that seem to have no value from a purely objective consideration. That is called culture. We don’t just observe things as they are without judgement - at least not everyone does that of course. They don’t have that cultivation of value, beauty, love that the human mind and heart is able to develop and to such a high degree that the objective is elevated to a vision of divinity. The deity is not seen as a mere statue by a devotee, or the sacred forest as mere wood. A great painting is not seen in the same way by a connoisseur of art as by others who are untrained may see it.”

“To emphasize this point, Srila Prabhupada once told us that while he was living in New York, ‘When I see a truck coming, I don’t see a truck, I see Krishna. During World War II when they were bombing Kolkata, everyone was telling ‘Oh Prabhupada please leave, they are going to bomb the city.’ Prabhupada said. ‘I am not going to leave. If Krishna wants to come in the form of a bomb to kill me then that is His mercy.’ He doesn’t think ‘a bomb is coming I should be afraid that I might be killed.’ He doesn’t think like that. That is Krishna consciousness,” Sripad Puri Maharaj explained, “But it should not be imitation [*sahajiyā*]. Krishna says, *vasudevah sarvām iti* (I [Vasudeva Krishna] am everything) in the *Bhagavad Gita - The Hidden Treasure of the Sweet Absolute: 7.19*

*bahunam janmanam ante
jnanavan mam prapadyate
vasudevah sarvām 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.”

“Who can see and understand that Krishna is in everything? Not an ordinary soul, but a *mahatma* - a great soul. We are ordinary souls living in a world of Maya (illusion). It is a place of ignorance, where we are forgetting something very important and of great value -- that is the nature of Maya. Everyone is thinking that they are independent of Krishna, they are separate from Him, or that there is no God. In the *Gita* Krishna is saying the exact opposite-- *vasudevah sarvām iti* (everything is connected with Me). Somehow we have lost that awareness, that knowledge, that consciousness. This is what Krishna is telling us. Krishna is the Supreme Personality of Godhead. *Ishvar parama Krishna sac-cid-ananda vigraha* - the supreme Lord (Ishvar) creator, controller and ultimate identity of all is Krishna. He is telling us these things in *Bhagavat-*

gita. He is telling us that ‘I am everything and by following my instructions you can come to Me, back to your true consciousness and understanding. Come to Krishna consciousness, and that is the instruction of the Supreme Lord through *Bhagavat-gita*,’ Sripad Puri Maharaj explained. “Lord Brahma says in the *Brahma Samhita*: 5.1 in praise of Lord Krishna:

*ishvarah paramah krishna
sac-cid-ananda-vigraha
anadir adir govindaha
sarva-karana-karanam*

“Krishna who is known as Govinda is the Supreme Godhead. He has an eternal blissful spiritual body. He is the origin of all. He has no other origin and He is the prime cause of all causes.”

“Krishna consciousness means to affectionately remember Krishna. *man-mana bhava mad-bhakta* – come to Me, become my devotee, keep your mind in devotion to Me; if you have love for Me you won’t forget Me so easily,” *Bhagavad Gita - The Hidden Treasure of the Sweet Absolute* 9.34 confirms this:

*man-mana bhava mad-bhakto
mad-yaji mam namaskuru
mam evaisyasi yuktvaivam
atmanam mat-parayanah*

“Engage your mind always in thinking of Me, offer obeisances and worship Me. Being completely absorbed in Me, surely you will come to Me.”

“If you don’t have love for someone, you don’t think about them, isn’t it? So in the same way, if we have love for Krishna, we will always be thinking how we can have a relationship with the Supreme Lord and that is what Krishna is asking us to do through His instructions. This is the value He has given to this life. This is the highest of all values, otherwise we are missing the point. We are living in illusion trying to get so many pieces of the environment for ourselves to make us happy because we don’t know what the real value of life is, so we take cheap things as valuable,” Sripad Puri Maharaj explained. “Srla Prabhupada called it ‘polished animal life.’ Getting so many things, so much money, big house, education, this and that gadget, for what? Without knowing Krishna it is simply polished animal life.” After a brief pause, he said, “Srla Prabhupada speaks very strongly like this and the *Srimad Bhagavatam* also speaks very strongly about this. ‘Polished animal,’ why does he speak like this? Because we are wasting our lives just like the camels, dogs, asses, hogs, (*sva-vid-varahoshtra-kharaih, Bhag* 2.3.19) just eating, sleeping, defending and mating. The animals are doing that, then, what is the big advantage if the humans are doing that also in a more sophisticated way. Krishna tells us this because He’s trying to give us the proper conception to see that the most valuable thing is there, that we are heirs to that most valuable thing beyond all material riches, the fullest in beauty, wisdom, and strength -- and to not know that and to not engage ourselves in service to that is a sin. We have available the sweetest, and most valuable thing but we are not looking for that. That is a sin!”

“Even in the apparent absence of Krishna, a devotee always remembers Him. This is called *vipralambha bhava* or love in separation. Mahaprabhu came to show how the devotees can serve in this mood. This is very important in a materialistic age where people think ‘God is dead.’”

At this point *pravachan* came to an end and *prasadam* was served and honored by all.



L - R: Back Row - First time guests: Brajaseva, Uma devi, Akshita, Mahesh ji with Bakula Mataji, Prabhus: Sai , Sripad Puri Maharaj, Syamasundara das and Rasaraja das in the front row.

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
(New York)

[1] The Disciplic Succession - http://scsmath.com/docs/disciplic_succession.html

[2] Srila Guru Maharaj: http://www.scsmath.com/docs/sridhar_maharaj.html

[3] http://scsmath.org/trove2/brahma_gayatri.html

[4] Sri Krishna Chaitanya Mahaprabhu - http://scsmath.com/docs/chaitanya_mahaprabhu.html

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