

Sri Sri Guru Gaurangau Jayatah
Bhakti Vedanta Institute
Princeton University Harinama
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As the New York devotees Prabhus Syamasundara das and Dr. Murli Gopal das, Kushum devi dasi and a friend, Jean-Paul, arrived at Princeton University for Harinaam, the topic of “Near-death experience (NDE) ^[1] were being discussed by Sripad Bhakti Vedanta Bhagavat Maharaja (Sripad Bhagavat Maharaj). Giving several examples to emphasize his point, Sripad Bhagavat Maharaj quoted Ian Pretyman Stevenson’s ^[2] writings on NDE and Dr. Michael Newton’s ^[3] writings on “Past Life Regression,” a technique that uses hypnosis to recover memories of past lives. Accordingly he said that Dr. Newton has taken “Past Life Regression to another level,” which then led to the next topic, reincarnation.

*vasamsi jirnani yatha vihaya
navani grhnati nara 'parani
tatha sarirani vihaya jirnany
anyani samyati navani dehi*

“As a person adopts new garments, discarding those that are old and worn, similarly, the soul continues to adopt new bodies, leaving those that are old and useless.” *Bhagavad-gita: 2.22*

“There’s a whole body of works called ‘Between Lives’ by professor Newton, whom had caught a person between two lives,” Sripad Bhagavat Maharaj continued. Dr. Newton asked that person what he was doing and he replied that he was flying. When asked where he was flying to, he replied that ‘to a group meeting.’ Pressed for more answered, that person then said ‘those who has passed but have not yet gone to either heaven or hell are in between births.’ Everyone in this kind of situation has a group that they go to and talk to the group leader. The group leader then explains what ‘I did wrong or right in my previous life and how I have progressed or developed certain qualities and what I need to improve on.’” At this meeting the individual is then offered different choices such as ‘a hard life where all the lessons in life are learned,’ or an “easier life where lesser lessons will be learned.””



A section of the audience taking prasadam while listening to sangat at the same time

Sripad Bhagavat Maharaj continued to share the various incidents described in the book “Life between Lives” where several people saw the “white light” and “monsters with chains and ropes” standing in the same room as the dying person. “This is called ‘shared death experience (SDE),’” Sripad Bhagavat Maharaj explained. In a typical SDE, “these people are in the same room with the dying loved one and are experiencing a portion of the NDE.”

“Maharaj, is there anything in the Vedic scriptures that speaks about the light?” Dr. Murli Gopal das Prabhu asked. “My experience is that Krishna makes arrangements for people to see and understand things in a certain way in order to move them along,” Sripad Bhagavat Maharaj responded. He then added that if we have access to the internet, specifically youtube, “you can see some really amazing things there.”

At this point, Sripad Bhagavat Maharaj held his audience of about 20 devotees’ attention with the various examples of “actual” NDE and SDE experiences.

After a brief pause, Sripad Bhagavat Maharaj said, “There is something interesting that Srila Prabhupada^[5] said in the *Srimad Bhagavatam*. He said that the ‘Hare Krishna mantra [Hare Krishna, Hare Krishna, Krishna Krishna, Hare Hare / Hare Rama, Hare Rama, Rama Rama, Hare Hare] is potent. But it becomes more potent when it is given in *diksha*,” Sripad Bhagavat Maharaj said. “When you received it from the lips of a sadhu (an ascetic holy man) it becomes more powerful.”



Sripad Puri Maharaj with Krishna das Prabhu, his wife and mother, who graced us with the darshan of sweet Bal Gopal

“What about receiving the Name, [Sri Krishna’s Holy Name]?” Sripad Bhakti Madhava Puri Maharaj, Ph.D (Sripad Puri Maharaj) asked. “Srila Sridhar Maharaja explained that the real potency of the Name derives from the concept of the person who is delivering the Name, just like the homeopathic globule is potentiated by the medicine deposited in it.”

In emphasizing that reincarnation does exist, Sripad Bhagavat Maharaj referenced the book “I have Lived Before,” which detailed the life of Shanti devi’s previous life in

Mathura, India, as Lugdi Devi, now Shanti devi in New Delhi, India. “She said ‘I was seeing Krishna’s name the whole time...I saw them putting the white sheet over my face. Then they brought my husband and sons in and I was saying ‘what are they doing. I am here. I was saying Krishna, Krishna please help me. Krishna, Krishna please tell them I am here,’” Sripad Bhagavat Maharaj responded.

“Without the conception of the Holy Name, which is coming from guru^[5] the Name is just sound vibration. Conception is the real potency. That’s the real siddhanta (tradition),” Sripad Puri Maharaj continued. “She never got initiated by a bonafide sadhu so therefore Krishna’s Holy Name did not have the same potency as it would for a devotee,” Sripad Bhagavat Maharaj clarified. “After many births, a wise man comes to know God, Krishna.” This is stated in *the Bhagavad-gita*: 7.19 as follows:

*bahūnām janmanām ante
jñānavān mām prapadyate
vāsudevaḥ sarvam iti
sa mahātmā su-durlabhah*

“After many, many births, the knowledgeable person (who happens to attain the association of such a pure devotee) finally comes to understand that the whole universe of moving and stationary being is of the nature of Vasudeva alone, inasmuch as all are subordinate to Vasudeva. Having grasped this conception, he surrenders unto Me. Know such a great soul to be extremely rare.”

“To the scientist, life is a product of chemical reaction but life is much more than chemistry... it’s about consciousness,” Sripad Puri Maharaj said as he described “natural genetic engineering” where the “genes are re-arranging themselves based on certain circumstances or situations because the organism is conscious. Cells do not die or go through the aging process because they live off the molecular machine of the living cells. Each cell has a soul.... There’s a soul in everything even in every atom. ” In agreement, Krishna das Prabhu added that, “matter is a by-product of life.”

*avināśi tu tad viddhi
yena sarvam idaṁ tatam
vināśam avyayasyāsya
na kaścit kartum arhati*

“Know that the soul who pervades the entire body is imperishable. He is unchangeable and everlasting, and no one can destroy him.” *Bhagavad-gita*: 2.17

Moving on to the next topic, Dr. Murli Gopal das Prabhu asked, what is the relationship between Brahman and Pradhan? “Brahman is the soul of the universe,” Sripad Bhagavat Maharaj said. “Pradhan is not part of the spiritual world. It is the unmanifest material energy.”

“Krishna is the source of Brahman,” Sripad Puri Maharaj said. As clearly confirmed in the *Śrīmad Bhāgavatam* 1.1.1:

*om̐ namo bhagavate vāsudevāya
janmādy asya yato 'nvayād itarataś cārtheṣv abhijñāḥ svarāt
tene brahma hṛdā ya ādi-kavaye muhyanti yat sūrayaḥ
tejo-vāri-mṛdām̐ yathā vinimayo yatra tri-sargo 'mṛṣā
dhāmnā svena sadā nirasta-kuhakaṁ satyaṁ param̐ dhīmahi*

“O my Lord, Śrī Kṛṣṇa, son of Vasudeva, O all-pervading Personality of Godhead, I offer my respectful obeisances unto You. I meditate upon Lord Śrī Kṛṣṇa because He is the Absolute Truth and the primeval cause of all causes of the creation, sustenance and destruction of the manifested universes. He is directly and indirectly conscious of all manifestations, and He is independent because there is no other cause beyond Him. It is He only who first imparted the Vedic knowledge unto the heart of Brahmājī, the original living being. By Him even the great sages and demigods are placed into illusion, as one is bewildered by the illusory representations of water seen in fire, or land seen on water. Only because of Him do the material universes, temporarily manifested by the reactions of the three modes of nature, appear factual, although they are unreal. I therefore meditate upon Him, Lord Śrī Kṛṣṇa, who is eternally existent in the transcendental abode, which is forever free from the illusory representations of the material world. I meditate upon Him, for He is the Absolute Truth.”



Some of the devotees with Sripad Puri Maharaj and Sripad Bhagavat Maharaj Jean Paul with Syamasundara das Prabhu

All Glories to Sri Guru and Sri Gauranga
Srila Bhakti Nirmal Acharya Dev-Goswami Maharaja ki jai

Your humble servant
Kushum devi dasi

^[1] A near-death experience (NDE) refers to personal experiences associated with impending death, encompassing multiple possible sensations including detachment from the body, feelings of levitation, total serenity, security, warmth, the experience of absolute dissolution, and the presence of a light. These phenomena are usually reported after an individual has been pronounced clinically dead or very close to death. NDEs are among the phenomena studied in the fields of psychology, psychiatry, and hospital medicine. - Wikipedia – The Free Encyclopedia

^[2] Ian Pretyman Stevenson (October 31, 1918 – February 8, 2007) was a Canadian psychiatrist. He worked for the University of Virginia School of Medicine for 50 years, as chair of the department of psychiatry from 1957 to 1967, Carlson Professor of Psychiatry from 1967 to 2001, and Research Professor of Psychiatry from 2002 until his death

^[3] Michael Duff Newton, Ph.D. hypnotherapist, member of the American Counseling Association and founder of *The Michael Newton Institute for Life Between Lives Hypnotherapy (TNI)*. He is an author of books on past life regression. - Wikipedia – The Free Encyclopedia

^[4] His Divine Grace A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Srila Prabhupada is the founder Acharya of the International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON)

^[5] Guru is a Sanskrit term for "teacher" or "master", in the Indian culture. The Hindu *guru-shishya* tradition is the oral tradition or religious doctrine or experiential wisdom transmitted from teacher to student. In the United States, the meaning of "guru" has been used to cover anyone who acquires followers, especially by exploiting their naiveté, due to the inflationary use of the term in new religious movements.^[1]