

*Sri Sri Guru Gaurangau Jayatah*  
Princeton University Harinama Nov. 24, 2012  
**Bhakti Vedanta Institute**  
Princeton, NJ

Last Saturday's *Harinam Sankirtan* was a bit different than what we had experienced thus far. Sripad Bhakti Madhava Puri Maharaj, Ph.D. (Puri Maharaj) opened today's *sanga* with a question: The "problem of evil," what is it? While the Western, Judeo-Christian tradition has the problem of evil, India has the philosophy of karma.

"The problem of evil" can be stated very simply: How could there be evil if God exist? Supposedly, God is all good and the creator of all, then why do bad things happen to people? Some say that the origin of evil is based on misuse of free will, by rebellion against God. Puri Maharaj explained that according to the Judeo-Christian philosophy, "if you do not follow God's instructions then you are punished," hence, evil exist because we have disobeyed God's laws. But according to Ancient India Vedic philosophy, what we call "bad" results from action and reaction, or the law of cause and effect, which forms an integral part of Vedic philosophy, hence, every person is responsible for his or her own acts and thoughts.

"Why then are there so many differences between births, wealth, family and country status of an individual," Bakula Mata ji asked, "Due to the transmigration of the soul and due to Karma, which is neither good nor bad but [arise from] the laws of nature," Puri Maharaj responded.

At this point, one of Puri Maharaja's guests from last week, Nancy, arrived and a recap of the conversation was given. Following the recap, Nancy wanted to know what is the "concept of compassion" as described in the Bhagavad Gita, which she finds "missing when connecting with everyone." Puri Maharaj explained that "Sri Krishna did not abandon us. He's constantly coming according to the need of the people. He comes personally to take care of evil. He's waiting for us, encouraging us to come to Him but He's not forcing us...nothing is happening without His Will – "it's only a misconception." Sri Krishna said in the Bhagavad-Gita, 4.17:

*yada yada hi dharmasya  
glanir bhavati bharata  
abhyutthanam adharmasya  
tadatmanam srijamy aham*

"Whenever and wherever there is a decline in religious practice, O descendant of Bharata, and a predominant rise of irreligion--at that time I descend Myself."

Samsara – cycle of birth and death where one continues to be born and reborn in various realms of life, depending on ones' karma was the next topic Puri Maharaj delved into. "There is always a past, present, future but the most substantial is the eternal present." The past is explained as a "memory, a mental idea," while the future is described as an

“imagination, a possibility,” but the present “is and is not at the same moment...it is the only tangible thing we have but it’s always fleeting.” It is something ephemeral, that seems so concrete but cannot be grasped or comprehended. Ultimate reality is like that – inconceivable. This is called “learned Ignorance - the more you learn, the more you realize you do not know anything.”

We, the two guests, Revant, and Nancy, and the New York devotee (Surottama das Prabhu his wife, Bakula Mataji and their two daughters and a friend: Srimati Lakshmi, Devahuti and Rama; Syamasundara das Prabhu his wife Srngara Mataji and their 5-years old son, Nitai and myself), were held spell-bound by the transcendental nectar we were receiving. Puri Maharaja’s explanations were so elaborate that no one interrupted.

“Everything has its proper utility, even emotion. We cannot have devotion without emotion...we are meant to love but who or what should we love is to be decided,” Puri Maharaj said. *Jnana*, or standing aloof or apart from the sense world to analyze it, is a form of renunciation, “but is half knowledge because what you are running away from is still within you, hence it is incomplete.” The *Bhagavad-Gita* 2.59 states that:

*visaya vinivartante  
niraharasya dehinah  
rasa-varjam raso 'py asya  
param drstva nivartate*

“The embodied soul may be restricted from sense enjoyment, though the taste for sense objects remains. But, ceasing such engagements by experiencing a higher taste, he is fixed in consciousness.”



**L-R: guest; Revant, Smts: Lakshmi, Rama, Bakula Mataji, Prabhus: Surottama das and Syamasundara das. Sitting in the middle are Smt. Devahuti and Nitai das**

Puri Maharaj further explains that karma refers to the exploitative mode, because it involves an intention to get some selfish result by performing an action. If one performs

one's duty without attachment, then that is renunciation. But Bhakti means dedication, and "is our constitutional position as eternal servants of Sri Krishna."

"Is the world beyond the conception of human mind," Revant, another guest, asked. "We have some conception, if not, we would not be able to survive here," Puri Maharaj responded. He further explained that Quantum Theory "allows us to make atomic bombs, lasers, etc. but does not say what an atom is. It only describes wave-functions."

After a moment's silence, Puri Maharaj asked, what is matter? After several attempts from the audience to answer, he explained that it is the field of possibility. "The field of possibility is an indefinable, but formable thing." For example, a lump of clay can be molded into a variety of forms. Using the desk as an example, he said that the desk is the "manifestation of the field of possibility because of consciousness. Without consciousness there's no question of possibility or expectation."

Puri Maharaj further explains that the ancient Indian Vedic culture informs us that according to our consciousness we get a material form and without recognizing this, we are living in Maya, illusion, thinking the body creates consciousness. "According to our consciousness we are interpreting things. Overall, we have to try to understand what is the purpose of life and we will begin to change our relationship with things, people etc....Consciousness determines our reality."

That which is sought after, the desirable things in life is considered as the *puruṣārtha* of human existence. There are generally four such *puruṣārthas*, namely: (1) *Dharma* (duty), (2) *Artha* (material wealth), (3) *Kama* (desire/enjoyment) and (4) *Moksha* (salvation or the absence of *moha* (delusion). But then there is also the transcendental or fifth dimension of life, *Bhakti* (devotion).

Puri Maharaj explained that *Dharma*, *Artha* and *Kama* are in the exploitation category while *Moksha* is in the renunciation category. "At the end, we gain some knowledge then we come to a decision that all these things are useless." As stated in the *Śrīmad Bhāgavatam* 7.6.4:

*tat-prayāso na kartavyo  
yata āyur-vyayaḥ param  
na tathā vindate kṣemaṁ  
mukunda-caraṇāmbujam*

"Endeavors merely for sense gratification or material happiness through economic development are not to be performed, for they result only in a loss of time and energy, with no actual profit. If one's endeavors are directed toward Kṛṣṇa consciousness, one can surely attain the spiritual platform of self-realization. There is no such benefit from engaging oneself in economic development."

At the renounced stage in life, we may begin to ask, “What is the meaning of life? Are we just molecules bumping around? How can we get relief from it all and become detached from it all?” In the Śrīmad Bhāgavatam (12.3.51), it is stated that:

*kaler doṣa-nidhe rājann  
asti hy eko mahān guṇaḥ  
kīrtanād eva kṛṣṇasya  
mukta-saṅgaḥ paraṁ vrajet*

“My dear King, although *Kali-yuga* is an ocean of faults, there is still one good quality about this age: Simply by chanting the Hare Kṛṣṇa *maha-mantra* (*Hare Krishna, Hare Krishna/Krishna Krishna, Hare Hare/Hare Rama, Hare Rama/Rama Rama, Hare Hare*), one can become free from material bondage and be promoted to the transcendental kingdom.”

Bhakti, on the other hand which is in the mode of dedication, is a transcendental category, as it is not directed toward the self, but is selfless service dedicated to the Supreme Autocrat, Sri Krishna. This is confirmed in the Bhagavad-Gita 18.55:

*bhaktya mam abhijanati  
yavan yas casmi tattvatah  
tato mam tattvato jnatva  
visate tad-anantaram*

“One can understand Me as I am, as the Supreme Personality of Godhead, only by devotional service. And when one is in full consciousness of Me by such devotion, he can enter into the kingdom of God.”

After about more than an hour, that transcendental sanga came to an end. We then honored *prasadam* after *kirtan* which was led by Surottama das Prabhu on harmonica and Syamasundara das on guitar, while the other family members and guests played various other musical instruments. *Kirtan, Mahamantra*, was the sweetest sound to our ears.



**Prabhus: Surottama das and Syamasundara das with Puri Maharaj**



**Bakula Mata ji with Prabhus: Surottama das and Syamasundara das**

The only unanswered question remained was: why did *sanga* end so soon?

*Harinama Sankirtana Ki Jai!*

Your humble servant,  
Kushum devi dasi