

Sri Sri Guru Gaurangau Jayatah
Bhakti Vedanta Institute
Princeton University Harinama
Princeton, NJ
Nov. 9, 2013

Sripad Bhakti Madhava Puri Maharaj, Ph.D (Sripad Puri Maharaj) opened our outdoor Harinam with the Hare Krishna Mahamantra (*Hare Krishna Hare Krishna Krishna Hare Hare/Hare Ram Hare Ram Ram Ram Hare Hare*) with Prabhus: Syamasundara das on guitar and Jadu Krishna das on kartals. Intermittently I distributed about fifty flyers as I invited the passers-by back to the Bhakti Vedanta Institute (BVI) office for sanga and lunch.



L to R: Jadu Krishna das Prabhu, Sripad Puri Maharaj and Syamasundara das Prabhu with several young first-timer Harinama dancers.

For the next hour Harinam set the stage on “fire” today. As usual, Sripad Puri Maharaj upbeat variations of several kirtans brought Harinam Sankirtan to a whole new level of spreading the Lord’s holy names through music to the public. It was so rocking that many passers-by were dancing to the various kirtan melodies and rhythm. It was an absolutely out-of-this-world experience. We need to spread more Harinam Sankirtan like this in every corner of the globe. I do not have enough adjectives to describe the ecstasy.

As we were approaching 1:30 PM, we head back to the BVI office to begin sanga. Just then two guests arrived with one of the flyers I had handed-out during Harinam on the beautiful Princeton University campus grounds. After welcoming the guests, who are visiting science students from China, Zhao Yuchen and Chen Haoqi, Sripad Puri Maharaj explained the significance of Diwali.^[1] “Diwali is celebrated because of Lord Ramachandra’s victory over the demon, Ravan. Lord Ramachandra is an incarnation of Lord Krishna, the Supreme Personality of God.” He went on to explain that Diwali is a nine day celebration in India and all over the Hindu world. “Diwali is

one of the most important festivals of the year for Hindus all over,” Sripad Puri Maharaj said. “Diwali celebrates the return of Lord Ramachandra after 14 years of exile. So to welcome his return, diyas (small clay lamps filled with ghee [clarified butter] or oil) are lit and kept burning throughout the night.”

There were small battery-lit lamps (open flames are prohibited on the Institute’s premise) laid out on the table to be offered to Lord Damodara (the baby form of Sri Krishna). Sripad Puri Maharaj opened sanga by singing the Damodarastakam^[2] as we offered the lamps. The two guests also participated in offering of the lamps.



Yasoda Mata chasing after, catching and binding Lord Damodara (baby form of Lord Krishna)

Immediately after Damodarastakam a deep conversation on science and religion ensued between Sripad Puri Maharaj and his two guests, Chen Haoqi and Zhao Yuchen, a neuroscience student with a Buddhist religious background. “Buddha is connected to Krishna, who is the main God in India,” Sripad Puri Maharaj said. “Krishna comes in different forms and Buddha is also one of the incarnations of Krishna. Buddha appeared about 1,500 years ago, Chaitanya Mahaprabhu,^[3] who is also an incarnation of Krishna, appeared 500 years ago and Krishna Himself appeared 5,000 years ago.”

“Chaitanya Mahaprabhu said to just chant the names of God because the age we are living in is too difficult for performing yoga, sacrifice and worship properly. This age is called Kaliyug which is the most difficult age of all the ages because there is so much fighting and hypocrisy among the people, so nothing can be purer than chanting the names of God. Mahaprabhu has given us the simple mantra called Mahamantra for this age. Have you heard of the WWW? I call it worship without walls. Chaitanya Maharprabhu’s has given us the sankirtan movment where anyone can worship God anywhere and anytime by chanting the Holy Names of God,” Sripad Puri Maharaj said, then asked if his guests have heard of the Vedas. They both responded in the negative. “Veda is called revealed knowledge because it came directly from God to man.”

Next, Sripad Puri Maharaj introduced his guests to some of the activities of a Vaisnava. “We follow a strict diet consisting of vegetable, fruits, grains and milk products because Krishna likes only vegetables, fruits, nuts, grains and milk products.” This is confirmed in the *Srimad Bhagavad Gita - The Hidden Treasure of the Sweet Absolute*, 9.26 where Bhagvan Sri Krishna says:

*patraṁ puṣpaṁ phalaṁ toyāṁ
yo me bhaktyā prayacchati
tad ahaṁ bhakty-upahṛtam
aśnāmi prayatātmanah*

“If one offers Me with devotion a leaf, flower, fruit or water, I affectionately accept that offering of the clean hearted devotee.”

“In our life we discuss about Lord Krishna auspicious pastimes and whatever we do, we do that for Krishna’s pleasure. If we are working, we give some donation to programs like this to spread Krishna’s holy names and activities. Whatever we eat we first offer to Krishna because then it becomes free from sin and we do not get the karmic reaction of eating food that was not offered.” *Srimad Bhagavad Gita* 9.27 – 28 confirms this:

*yat karosi yad asnasi
yaj juhosi dadasi yat
yat tapasyasi kaunteya
tat kurusva mad-arpanam*

“O Kaunteya, whatever you do, whatever you eat, whatever you offer in sacrifice, whatever you give and whatever vow you may keep—do everything as an offering unto Me.”

*subhasubha-phalair evam
moksyaśe karma-bandhanaih
sannyasa-yoga-yuktatma
vimukto mam upaisyasi*

“Acting thus, you will be freed from bondage to action and its auspicious or inauspicious results. With mind selflessly linked to Me, you will be perfectly liberated and you will come to Me.”

Where does rice come from? Sripad Puri Maharaj asked then answered. “Rice comes from Mother Earth. You put the seeds in the earth then the rice grain comes up. This is the link that the scientists are missing. Life comes from life, not that life comes from matter. You come from your parents and they came from their parents. Your parents are not a bag of chemicals. They are alive. The scientist thinks that life is just a combination of chemical reactions going on in the body but they haven’t been able to find any chemicals to make any life. How can life come from matter?”

Sripad Puri Maharaj continued, "Then who is the first life? God! He is the original life and all life is coming from Him. According to Christianity, 'we are made in the image and likeness of God.'"

Why this human form of life? was the next question Sripad Puri Maharaj asked. "According to the Vedas, He [Krishna] has a form, the original form." Citing various examples, he said, "Every species of living entities has its' particular form and it does not change because that's the divine order of things. These things are not sentimental, they are scientific." In response, Haoqi, who believes in evolution said, "We agree with the idea that life comes from life. Science tries to explain everything but they are not able to. They are reasonable in some way." In counter, Sripad Puri Maharaj said, "We have a brain, a mind, thoughts, we have consciousness, how does matter explain that?"

"Besides material nature, there are laws of nature on how everything functions and how the materials are organized. We can not make life from chemicals because the law is really beautiful and complicated. Maybe it is something beyond our human power to surpass. We don't try to make life or go beyond the law. We just want to understand the beauty of nature." Haoqi said. "But the laws that science has today, like Newton's law, Einstein theory of relativity, quantum laws are not perfect."

"Sometime we think that all the things in the world are like a form of energy. If the energy is strong enough, then it becomes material. In the empty space, there is still some energy. Maybe the energy is not strong enough so you can not see or touch them but they exist," Yuchen said. "It is not just energy," Sripad Puri Maharaj responded then asked, what is energy? In using electrical energy as an example, he asked if electrical energy just exists in the air. "In order to get electricity, you have to have a generator. Energy just does not exist on its own like that. It has to have a source. Energy has to be produced by an energetic source just like the electricity coming through this light bulb. Where is that electricity coming from?" Sripad Puri Maharaj asked. "If you look further back, you will see there is a dynamo somewhere that is producing that electricity either by falling water or by burning coal or something. That electricity is being generated. It's not enough to simply say energy. We have to ask, what is the source of that energy? That energetic source is Krishna. There is Krishna and His energy."



Sripad Puri Maharaj with Zhao Yuchen and Chen Haoqi participating in chanting the Mahamantra

Where does His [Krishna's] energy come from? Yuchen asked. "He is the source of everything," Sripad Puri Maharaj responded. "We call that the Absolute Truth. Not everything is relative. If everything is relative, then we couldn't say relative. There must be some absolute in order to say relative." "In China it is called Tao [balance]," Yuchen said. "The Absolute Truth is also a balance of two things – male and female. We don't just believe that God is a man. Krishna is both male and female otherwise, why are there male and female in this world?" Sripad Puri Maharaj asked.

"It's an interesting fact that we get to the same point through different approaches whether it's through science or religion," Haoqi said. "I don't think so. I don't think science and religion are different but it is rather how we understand science," Sripad Puri Maharaj countered. "If we think of science only in terms of chemicals then that's not a right conception." Haoqi countered, "That idea is out of fashion. We deal with nature and everything from a different view. Just now you mentioned the generator. In fact we don't call it the generator. It is just something that is transforming the energy from another form of energy, not generating it. Energy is all around us. It just comes in different forms." Sripad Puri Maharaj then asked if energy is personal or impersonal. Haoqi responded that he has not thought about that. "Energy is impersonal. So where does this person come from?" Sripad Puri Maharaj asked. Not getting a response, he then asked if an impersonal energy can produce a person. "A person can produce energy and so many other things."

What does energy mean in science? Sripad Puri Maharaj asked then responded that energy means, "the ability to do work." Both, Haoqi and Yuchen agreed. "Energy comes from the person, not that the person comes from energy. We have to understand that reality is a person. The Vedas teach that consciousness is fundamental. If you are conscious then there's a person there. You can not be a person and not be conscious. That is the fundamental reality and truth. All this matter, energy and everything else comes from that," Sripad Puri Maharaj said, then asked, if you lose consciousness would the body stand up? Why does the body stand up? It is not your bones or your muscles that keep your body up, it's the consciousness. If you lose consciousness you will fall like a pile of bones." Haoqi asked, "So in this way, you are saying that animals, like cats and dogs also have a

consciousness.” “Of course, every living entity,” Sripad Puri Maharaj responded. “Consciousness, which is generally considered subject, can make something object to itself. Consciousness also means that you have to be conscious of something. It is called relational. Consciousness means consciousness of... There has to be an object of consciousness. We generally mean by consciousness a subject and object relationship,” Sripad Puri Maharaj said.

According to materialists, “a stone produced man, to inquire about that stone and where it came from. Does that make sense?” Sripad Puri Maharaj continued. “So in other words, the man is the servant of the stone. In order to understand what the stone is, the man had to be formed.” We all had a good laugh at the backwardness of the materialist mentality. “We don’t try to give a reason why creation made it that way,” Haoqi said. “We are not asking why but this is what the materialists say, that the stone produce the man so that the stone could know what it was,” Sripad Puri Maharaj responded. “We would not know what the stone was unless the man was there. All that trouble for the stone to find out through the man that it was a stone. Does that make sense? This is not sensible philosophy. Or to say that everything came from an explosion, how is that possible? If I put all the parts of a Boeing 747 in the big container and all the laws of nature and physics are there working on the parts and I shook that box, would a 747 come out of the box? Sripad Puri Maharaj asked his enraptured audience. “No, never, you can shake it for trillion or quadrillion of years; it would never come out of that box.”

“This is what fascinates us about life because life kind of works in a different way, not just by chemicals. It has its’ laws. We are humans, we make things on purpose. This will increase the possibilities that we would progress in a certain direction. We make choices,” Haoqi said. “But nature doesn’t make choices like that, it’s by chance.” Sripad Puri Maharaj responded. Haoqi continued, “That depends on how you see these things. As scientists we thought we are part of nature but we are of a superior form than the stones. We are kind-of complicated and we make choices. Stones don’t make choices. And we believe this is also part of science.” Sripad Puri Maharaj interjected that “this is not real science. Real science should take account of the fact that we are different from mere chemicals. What is that difference? What is that energy or vibration that we represent that is not given in the energies that constitute the material world? We say mind is there. Mind is part of reality. The Sankhya philosophy says there are eight (8) elements of reality – earth, water, fire, ether, air, mind, intelligence and ego. Mind and intelligence are also two different energies that scientists don’t study they are also part of reality. We can not say there’s no mind or intelligence in reality. We experience them everyday. There is consciousness but that is not part of the earth, water, fire, air and ether explanation. Within the realm of matter those things, although they exist in our experience, are not explained by our limited, materialistic scientific paradigm. That theory doesn’t really represent our reality. We say that science is not as scientific as it should be. It has to include these other things too,” Sripad Puri Maharaj said.

“We don’t say that science is bad or anything like that. The way you are thinking about science -- that is limited. Science when it gets to the true reality of things and it tries to explain it on the basis of all that we experience, and not just the things that have been handed down to us from some other scientists who were thinking in a limited way, then we can get a science that is in complete agreement with what religion also teaches. And a perfected religion will also see things in a very scientific way. It will be just as scientific as science but may approach it in a little different way,” Sripad Puri Maharaj continued. “Science proceeds in a thoughtful way and religion proceeds in a loving way though devotion. We don’t have to understand everything by calculation. By feeling we can also experience a wonderful and meaningful life. We can feel how everthing is moving and how we are to live, what we are to do or not do. We can understand all these things through feeling. Most of life does not go on with scientific thinking. People are engaged primarily in feeling relations with one another. That’s the reality, but where’s the teaching that embraces, explains or tries to understand that? That is what we are trying to do. That is Vedanta. It has the scientific, the thoughtful and the philosophical way of understanding. Vedanta also has the devotional way, so it embraces the whole perspective of life. It is very rational and systematic.”



L to R: Back Row - Prabhus: Syamasundara das and Jadu Krishna das with Sripad Puri Maharaj. Front Row: guest: Zhao Yuchen, Kushum devi dasi and guest: Chen Haoqi (group photo courtesy of CH).

Prasadam was served and honored by all. Then our new friends, Zhao Yuchen and Chen Haoqi, wanted to know if there would be more yoga and meditation . Sripad Puri Maharaj explained that “the chanting of the Lords’ holy names are another form of yoga and meditation.” Yuchen then turned to Syamasundara das Prabhu and asked if he would also play the guitar for them. At this point, Harinam Sankirtan led by Sripad Puri Maharaj with Prabhus: Syamasundara das and Jadu Krishna das on guitar and kartals began all over again for the next twenty minutes.

Harinam Sankirtana ki jai

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] Diwali or Deepavali (festival of lights). Diwali is an official holiday in India, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Myanmar, Mauritius, Guyana, Trinidad and Tobago, Suriname, Malaysia, Singapore and Fiji. [Wikipedia]

[2] This song is sung during the Month of Kartik, also known as the month of Damodara. "In the month of Kartika one should worship Lord Damodara and daily recite the prayer known as *Damodarastakam*, which has been spoken by the sage Satyavrata and which attracts Lord Damodara. (*Sri Hari-bhakti-vilasa* 2.16.198)." <http://bhaktiswarupadamodara.com/Damodarastakam.pdf>