

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

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In briefly introducing some topics to new-comer, Victoria, a social worker by profession, Sripad Bhakti Madhava Puri Maharaj, Ph.D (Sripad Puri Maharaj) asked “What is the meaning of our existence or why are we here?” Victoria, whom had heard about this program from “another attendee at a William-Sonoma’s cooking class,” decided to attend today’s program because she’s looking for an alternative way “on how to help the patients heal themselves.” Victoria replied that her existence here on earth is to make the world a better place. “Everyone thinks like that but is that what we are here for? Is that what we were created for?” Sripad Puri Maharaj asked. “What responsibility do we have in taking birth here? Our birth was basically given to us, but ultimately who was involved or handed it to us originally?” According to the “Christian view, we are here to know, love, and serve God,” and, according to the Ancient Indian Vedic culture, “we are eternal servants of God, constitutionally.” This is confirmed by Sri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu, the most recent incarnation of God, in the *Śrī Caitanya Caritāmṛta Madhya 20.108*,

*jīvera 'svarūpa' haya — kṛṣṇera 'nitya-dāsa'
kṛṣṇera 'tatasthā-śakti' 'bhedābheda-prakāśa'
sūryāmśa-kirāna, yaiche agni-jvālā-caya
svābhāvika kṛṣṇera tina-prakāra 'śakti' haya*

"It is the living entity's constitutional position to be an eternal servant of Kṛṣṇa because he is the marginal energy of Kṛṣṇa and a manifestation simultaneously one with and different from the Lord, like a molecular particle of sunshine or fire. Kṛṣṇa has three varieties of energy."

Sripad Puri Maharaj opened Harinam with the Pancha-Tattva Maha Mantra (*sri-krishna-chaitanya prabhu nityananda sri-advaita gadadhara srivasadi-gaura-bhakta-vrinda*) followed by the Hare Krishna Maha Mantra (*Hare Krishna Hare Krishna Krishna Hare Hare/Hare Ram Hare Ram Ram Ram Hare Hare*) with Syamasundara das Prabhu on guitar. A quick lesson on how to play the kartals was give to Victoria and another female guest, Shoba Mandava as they joined in on Harinam.



L to R: Syamasundara das Prabhu, Guests: Ved Gupta ji, Victoria, Revant and Shobha Mandava ji with Sripad Puri Maharaj

“There are several ways of chanting a mantra, such as Kirtan and Sankirtan. In a singing way, it is called kirtan, while chanting in a congregation is called Sankirtan,” Sripad Puri Maharaj explained. “Sri Chaitanya Maharprabhu^[1] who appeared five hundred years ago in Bengal [India], taught this Sankirtan process for God realization in this current age we are in, called Kaliyug. You have heard of www on the internet called the world wide web. Well I call Mahaprabhu’s sankirtan movement the universal religion, WWW – Worship Without Walls! Sri Chaitanya Maharprabhu is teaching that anyone can worship God and chant Hare Krishna anywhere.”

“In the Christian belief, they say ‘our father, hallowed be thy name.’ The Name of God is sacred, so by glorifying the Name, it is the easiest and most sublime process for becoming Krishna conscious in this Kaliyug. Kaliyug is the most difficult age because there is so much fighting and hypocrisy that people are becoming more atheistic as the days go on. So to counter that, this simple process of chanting the Hare Krishna mantra was given to us directly by Mahaprabhu,” Sripad Puri Maharaj said. “In previous ages, they used to do yoga, meditation, yajna^[2] which is very

hard to perform, but in this age it is not possible to do all those things, so simply by chanting the names of Lord Krishna we can make spiritual progress.”

After a brief pause, he said, “The Hare Krishna mantra, called the Mahamantra, is a very simple mantra for this age of Kali. By practicing this mantra daily in your life, by sitting down and chanting a regular set of mantras on the mala (which is like the rosary beads) everyday. If one has the opportunity to take initiation, *diksha*, from gurudev^[3] then it [the mantra] becomes easier because more potency is there for us to make progress in spiritual life by the seed of devotion and instruction we received from gurudev.”

At this point in sanga, Revant Prabhu, an astrophysics at Princeton University, came in and Sripad Puri Maharaj recapped what he was thus far discussing. “We are talking about chanting. How one can perform meditation through chanting of mantras either by japa, which means silently chanting on beads or singing in sankirtan (congregational) with the other devotees. One can either chant softly to oneself or loudly on the beads.” He continued that, “if we take initiation, *diksha*, the mantra that we get from gurudev becomes even more potent to help us make progress in spiritual life, and establish a direct connection through gurudev to the Supreme. Gurudev is the point at which we, the finite living entity, and the Infinite Supreme come into contact.”

“No ordinary person can become guru. Guru holds a very sacred position. Guru should not be misunderstood in the way we use the word “guru” in today’s society in a very flippant way. Guru is very sacred. The actual contact between the living entity and the Supreme Lord is called Guru. When the Infinite wants to make Himself known to the finite, He appears to us in the form of guru, otherwise it is very difficult for the finite to connect with the Infinite,” Sripad Puri Maharaj said then asked, “How does the finite approach the Infinite? Actually, the Infinite has to come to us.” This is confirmed in the *Śrīmad Bhāgavatam* 11.17.27,

*ācāryam’ mām’ vijānīyān
nāvanmanyeta karhicit
na martya-buddhyāsūyeta
sarva-deva-mayo guruḥ*

“One should know the ācārya as Myself and never disrespect him in any way. One should not envy him, thinking him an ordinary man, for he is the representative of all the demigods.”

In the purport of the *Śrīmad Bhāgavatam* 11.17.27, Srila Prabhupada^[4] explained that, "If one poses himself as an ācārya but does not have an attitude of servitorship to the Lord, he must be considered an offender, and this offensive attitude disqualifies him from being an ācārya. The bona fide spiritual master always engages in unalloyed devotional service to the Supreme Personality of Godhead. By this test he is known to be a direct manifestation of the Lord and a genuine representative of Śrī Nityānanda Prabhu. Such a spiritual master is known as ācāryadeva."

Since we are approaching the auspicious birth anniversary of Srila Sridhar Maharaj, ^[5] Sripad Puri Maharaj gave a brief history of his life. "Srila Sridhar Maharaj is the founder ācārya of the Math that we belong to. Math means spiritual institute. He appeared on this day [October 28] in India in 1895, and so every year we celebrate this day in a special way." Pointing to the photo he has on his desk of Srila Sridhar Maharaj and Srila Prabhupada, Sripad Puri Maharaj said, "I have taken initiation from both of them. I have been given Harinam (the mantra) from Srila Prabhupada and Sannyasa (renounced) from Srila Sridhar Maharaj. They are both my gurus but at different stages of my spiritual life. Both are very exalted souls."



Srila Sridhar Maharaj and Srila Prabhupada

"Srila Sridhar Maharaj was more of a withdrawing person and has a very interesting life. Srila Prabhupada was the one who came to the West and spread Krishna Consciousness throughout the whole world in a very grand way. Srila Sridhar Maharaj mostly stayed in and traveled all over India. He later withdrew to his ashram in Nabadwip and became more centered in his own Math, where many came to see him."

Referring to the Gayatri mantra ^[6] Sripad Puri Maharaj said to his attentive audience that Srila Sridhar Maharaj had written a commentary on the Gayatri. “He had such high realization that he told the meaning of the Gayatri in a marvelous way that we had never heard before, at least in the modern times.” Sripad Puri Maharaj went on to speak of the several books written by Srila Sridhar Maharaj. For example, ‘Subjective Evolution of Consciousness - The Play of the Sweet Absolute’ deals with how the consciousness evolved from one lifetime to another, and even within one lifetime consciousness can evolve. Consciousness can go from mundane to spiritual in this human form of life, which is specifically meant for that.”

“The consciousness of the living entity, in the mundane sense, is engaged in four activities: eating, sleeping, mating and defending. These four things constitute the involvement of the consciousness in the mundane world. You go to work but what do you go to work for? Basically for eating, for gaining some money to sustain yourself, then you go to sleep. And then sex is there, then you defend yourself if somebody attacks you,” Sripad Puri Maharaj said. “These activities are found among all living entities: the animals, the insects and even in the flowers.”

After a brief pause, Sripad Puri Maharaj asked, then answered, “What is the human form of life? Is the human form of life just meant to engage in these four activities like any dog in the streets does? Is that all this human form of life is meant for? Of course not! We have culture, philosophy, religion that are not found among the other creatures. What is that higher intelligence given to us for? What is the real purpose of that higher sense of existence that we seem to have? This is all described in the scriptures, Veda - knowledge that descends, not knowledge that is generated from the empirical investigation of the world. It is called revealed knowledge because it has come from the higher, transcendental plane down to us.”

“The Absolute Truth is not impersonal. He can talk. He can tell us what He wants. That is called Veda, which does not have any historical origins. It comes from the beginning of the universe, spoken by the Lord to Brahma, the creator of the world and handed down to us one generation after another through the line of gurus called *parampara*. So we can hear these things and learn that the purpose of our life is to not to just remain at the level of eating, mating, sleeping and defending but to try to understand what is our constitutional position and relationship with God,” Sripad Puri Maharaj said. “These things are given in Veda. Srila Sridhar Maharaj spoke these things in a beautiful way, and were recorded in many of his books, which are available online also. We don’t believe that one should just have a sentimental sense of love of God, we should have a more profound and substantial understanding of that.”

Sripad Puri Maharaj went on to say that, “Knowledge is necessary. The more you learn the more your consciousness is developed. Who has developed consciousness, they have knowledge of the higher things. They are not just sentimentalists who are chanting, singing and dancing. No, they have some consciousness and that consciousness means knowledge. They know about these transcendental subject matters.”

Coming full circle back to the auspicious birth anniversary of Srila Sridhar Maharaj, Sripad Puri Maharaj gave a very brief synopsis. “He was born in 1895 in Hapaniya, West Bengal, India and was the second child to his parents. His older sibling was a girl, who died at birth. He was named Ramendrasundar because his parents worship Lord Rama (an incarnation of Lord Krishna). He was very attracted to Lord Rama’s noble character. Srila Sridhar Maharaj has a very good memory and remembered everything from his childhood that left a deep impression on him. When he heard the sankirtan going on, he began to cry to his father. In order to stop him from crying they had to take him to the sankirtan. Just like Mahaprabhu who also would cry until people began chanting. As he became older he became attracted to the books on Chaitanya Mahaprabhu, who was always experiencing love of God but in separation. Srila Sridhar Maharaj became very attracted to Mahaprabhu’s attitude of renunciation toward the world and dedication to God.”

“Srila Sridhar Maharaj read a book on the Gayatri mantra and was very impressed with the idea that the Gayatri mantra was conscious. ‘Those words were themselves conscious entities and by remembering them, we are getting their blessings,’” Sripad Puri Maharaj continued. “Now that’s a very deep conception of the Absolute, because we generally think that I am conscious and that which is higher, nearer to God, may not be conscious. But the higher world is also conscious. Not that we are conscious and that is not. Actually our consciousness is subordinate to that consciousness and is controlled by it. Not that we are controlling it. It is controlling us because it can manifest itself to us in its’ own way, such as through Guru if we approach him in the proper mood, with humility and proper respect. Don’t think of the Absolute as something that we make up in our mind or imagination. It is something that has a very active engagement with us, otherwise we would not be active. Our energy is coming from the higher energy and it enables us to be conscious and to act. So that energy must also have its own activity and consciousness.”

“As I’ve said, Srila Sridhar Maharaj was very attracted to the teachings of Chaitanya Mahaprabhu so he wanted to learn more but did not know where to go to learn these things. One day he saw a poster from the

Gaudiya Math that they were having a festival. When he arrived at the festival he realized that these people have so much knowledge of Mahaprabhu. This is where he saw his Gurudev, Srila Bhaktisiddhanta Saraswati Thakura (1874–1936), who though engaged fully with the environment, his presence seemed indifferent to everything.” Sripad Puri Maharaj, referencing his past experiences, said, “that is something I also experienced with Srila Prabhupada. Srila Prabhupada looks like any ordinary person, but in his presence we could feel that he was not in the world like any ordinary person. We felt that he was very transcendently situated.”

“The body is made of carbon hydrogen, oxygen, etc. These things are dead -- right -- because they are matter. Then where is life coming from? Sripad Puri Maharaj asked. “The scientist thinks that life is just a combination of chemical reactions going on in the body -- that’s how they think life is happening. The point is they haven’t been able to find any chemicals to make any life.” Pointing to the sign on the wall that reads: ‘All the science and all the scientist in the world together cannot make a single blade of grass.’ No matter how much they try, they still can not make a blade of grass. Sripad Puri Maharaj continued. “And there’s something the grass is doing very easily and proficiently all over the world, but science can’t do that because they are missing the point. It’s not just matter, there’s something so much more profound than matter involved in our reality. What is that?” Sripad Puri Maharaj asked. “They have not been able to tell what that is by their analytical and scientific processes. So spiritual development is necessary to understand the difference between life and matter, and to understand what we are and what God is, and all higher non-material existence that have substantial meaning and truth. There’s nothing more substantial than our own life, who I am! People are spending thousands of dollars on education to learn mathematics, economics, science and so many other subjects but do you know who you are? What is that self? What is the soul? What is God? That is what is neglected. Maybe some instruction is given in a theology class but even there you will find that people don’t know what is the soul or who is God,” Sripad Puri Maharaj continued.

At the Gaura Purnima festival, after hearing the strong preaching of his Gurudev, Srila Bhaktisiddhanta Saraswati Thakura, who was so desparately pleading with the guests who had come to the festival that they must serve the Lord, even if the whole world was on fire, Srila Sridhar Maharaj became convinced that ‘this is what I must do. I must give my life here’ and he became a disciple of Srila Bhaktisiddhanta Saraswati Thakura. He took *diksa* and was given the name Ramananda and later went on to establish the mandir (temple) where Ramananda Rai and Chaitanya Mahaprabhu had a famous talk about Krishna Consciousness. In 1930 he took *sannyasa* and after that he established

his own Math in Nabadvip in 1942. In 1986 he transferred his guruship to Srila Govinda Maharaj^[7] and he left this world in 1988.”

As sanga was coming to a close, Sripad Puri Maharaj explained the four orders of life:

Brahmacharri (the student life), Grihastha (married/householder life), Vanaprastha (life retired from worldly affairs) and Sannyasa (renounced life). “So as one progresses in life, from a student to taking up householder life then after a certain amount of time the husband and wife go on a pilgrimage and they try to developed more spiritual consciousness. Living at different mandirs, visiting the holy places, and even after that the husband/wife live seperately at the final stages of their life.”

Ved Gupta ji asked, does this mean we have to only pray and at the last steps of life we take sannyasa? “Sannyasa stage can be taken anyting and at any age. It’s a matter of the heart...what you want genuinely, not artificially,” Sripad Puri Maharaj responded as he then explained that there are also four classes in society, *Varnashram*: Brahmanas (priests), Kshatriyas (protectors of society, fighters), Vaisyas (merchants) and the Sudras (laborers and farmers). “Krishna teaches us through the Veda the purpose of our existence and to understand our relationship with Him. These are classes in society which are due to our own karma we get this or that body, family and everything else in life. It’s all based on our past karma.” This is confirmed in the *Srimad Bhagavad Gita* - The Hidden Treasure of the Sweet Absolute, 4.13 and 18.41 where Bhagvan Sri Krishna says:

*catur-varnyam maya srstam
guna-karma-vibhagasah
tasya kartaram api mam
viddhy akartaram avyayam*

“The four social divisions, classified according to the material modes of nature and corresponding activities, are made manifest by Me. Although I am the doer of this, know Me to be the non-doer and unchangable.”

*brahmana-ksatriya-visam
sudranam ca parantapa
karmani pravibhaktani
svabhava-prabhavair gunaih*

“O Parantapa, according to their natures, the duties of the Brahmanas, ksatriyas, vaisyas and sudras are appropriately classified.”

How do we get some idea of the higher power? Ved ji asked. “*Sravanam* (hearing),” Sripad Puri Maharaj responded. “Spiritual world is beyond us but if we can hear and apply that, we may be granted entrance into that plane. We will know that by how much we are becoming detached from the mundane things.” *Srimad Bhagavatam* 7.5.23-24 confirms this:

*sri-prahrada uvaca
sravanam kirtanam vishnoh
smaranam pada-sevanam
arcanam vandanam dasyam
sakhyam atma-nivedanam
iti pumsarpita vishnau
bhaktis cen nava-lakshana
kriyeta bhagavaty addha
tan manye 'dhitam uttamam*

“Prahlada Maharaja said: Hearing and chanting about the transcendental holy name, form, qualities, paraphernalia and pastimes of Lord Vishnu, 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 Krishna through these nine methods should be understood to be the most learned person, for he has acquired complete knowledge.”

Prasadam was served and honored by all.

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] 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.

[2] Yajna –Vedic ritual of sacrifice

[3] Guru is a Sanskrit term for "teacher" or "master" in the Indian culture. The Hindu *guru-shikshya* 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.

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

[5] Srila Bhakti Raksak Sridhar Dev-Goswami Maharaj - Founder-President-Acharyya: Sri Chaitanya Saraswat Math - http://www.scsmath.com/docs/sridhar_maharaj.html

[6] *Om bhur bhuvah svah / tat-savitur varenyam / bhargo devasya dhimahi dhiyo yo nah pracodayat*

What is the meaning of gayatri? The word gayatri is a combination of two Sanskrit words: ganat (what is sung) and trayate (gives deliverance). This means, "A kind of song by which we can get our salvation, relief, emancipation." Gayatri is known as *veda-mata*, the mother of the Vedas. And Gayatri has produced the whole Veda." Srila Sridhar Maharaj wrote in the 'Gayatri Mantram Revealed.'

http://scsmath.org/trove2/brahma_gayatri.html

[7] Srila Bhakti Sundar Govinda Dev-Goswami Maharaj - Sevaite-President-Acharya: Sri Chaitanya Saraswat Math