

Sri Sri Guru Gaurangau Jayatah
Bhakti Vedanta Institute
Princeton University Harinama
Princeton, NJ
December 7, 2013

It was so cold outside that our little Harinama group came back to the Bhakti Vedanta Institute (BVI) office; there, Rasaraja das Prabhu opened Harinama with the Pancha Tattva Mahamantra (*jaya sri-krishna-caitanya prabhu nityananda / sri-advaita gadadhara srivasadi-gaura-bhakta-vrinda*) followed by the Maha Mantra (*Hare Krishna, Hare Krishna, Krishna Krishna, Hare Hare / Hare Rama, Hare Rama, Rama Rama, Hare Hare*). Syamasundara das Prabhu on guitar began by paying obeisances “*nama om vishnu-padaya, krishna-preshthaya bhutale....*” to Srila Prabhuapada. ^[1] Alternately indoors Harinam went on for the next hour. We were then joined by Sripad Bhakti Madhava Puri Maharaj, Ph.D. (Sripad Puri Maharaj).



Opening Harinama are Prabhus: Rasaraja das on kartals and Syamasundara das on guitar

To celebrate the 76th Appearance Day of Sripad Bhakti Svarupa Damodara Maharaja, Ph.D., lovingly known as Sripad Maharaj, we first offered a mala (flower garland) to his photo, and then Syamasundara das Prabhu, a disciple of Sripad Maharaj, offered the bhoga. Then, while Sripad Puri Maharaj sang the Sri Guru Vandana mantra: “*śrī-guru-caraṇa-padma, kevala-bhakati-sadma...*” we offered *pushpanjali* (an offering of flowers) to Sripad Maharaj.

Sripad Puri Maharaj opened sanga by giving a brief description of Sripad Maharaja’s personality and activities. “With Sripad Maharaja, Spd. Sadaputa Prabhu, and me, we officially established the Bhaktivedanta Institute in 1976.” Smiling he continued, “During his life, Sripad Maharaj met many Nobel laureate scientists, the Pope, Mother Theresa and so many other influential persons. He

held several international conferences on science and religion, and inspired many devotees all over the world; many became his disciples. He established one of ISKCON's most beautiful mandirs (temples) in Manipur. He has also established the University of Bhagavat Culture to teach that life comes from life. He authored a number of books. We have here (in the office) several of his books.

"The book: 'Life comes from Life,' is very unique because it is a compilation from several of his 'morning walk' conversations with Srila Prabhupada where he would ask questions and Srila Prabhupada would give the answers," Sripad Puri Maharaj continued. "He is one of the most intimate disciples of Srila Prabhupada, who loved him very much." After a brief pause, Sripad Puri Maharaj said that, "Srila Prabhupada always got very enlivened when his 'scientist' would visit. He would train him how to preach to the other scientist that life comes from life. So he [Sripad Maharaj] made following his spiritual master's instruction his mission in life. Later he founded the United Religions Initiative (URI), with some other religious leaders around the world who were interested in bringing the religious cultures together so there wouldn't be so much fighting amongst them." Sripad Puri Maharaj continued. "Sripad Maharaj had a very glorious lifetime fulfilling the order of his gurudev (spiritual master)."



L to R: Rasaraja das Prabhu, Sripad Puri Maharaj, Prabhus: Syamasundara das and Revant ji.

In a Vyasa Puja letter "The Gift of Dr. T.D. Singh to the Founding of the United Religions Initiative," by Rev. Charles P. Gibbs, Executive Director United Religions Initiative (URI), USA, Rev. Gibbs described Sripad Maharaj as an "exemplar of the quality of leaders these young people envisioned as essential to a more peaceful and just future for all..."

“The ultimate desire that a devotee has is to receive instructions from his gurudev as to what type or kind of service he should do,” Sripad Puri Maharaj said. “So gurudev understands what type of service we should do and if we dedicate our life to that service then we become very happy, very joyful and do things that, under ordinary circumstances we would never be able to do. Just like Sripad Maharaj – he was a very simple village boy from Manipur. He became a scientist but he would have never met all of the scientists and influential people he had met, did all those things he accomplished, influenced so many people, the way he did if he were on his own. It was just by the inspiration from his gurudev and the desire to follow that inspiration that he was able to have a very glorious and joyful life. He was always a very ecstatic soul.”

Pointing to a picture on the wall, Sripad Puri Maharaj said, “this is one of my favorite pictures of him. I used to tell him that he was like a ‘humming bird’ because he used to travel everywhere. He would seldom sit in one place for more than a few days, except maybe in his office in Kolkata, but he was always traveling and relishing nectar with the devotees.” Smilingly Sripad Puri Maharaj continued, “I said to him, like a humming bird, you are not only taking nectar but are also giving nectar to the devotees. Everyone becomes very happy when they see him and feel inspiration again to carry on with their Krishna consciousness seva (service).”



“The Humming Bird” - Sripad Bhakti Svarupa Damodara Maharaja

At this point of sanga, the floor is opened for questions. “I don’t understand what exactly you meant when you say Krishna Consciousness” Revant Prabhu inquired. “Krishna Consciousness means first to understand that Krishna is the ultimate reality. The truth that we are all searching for, that is Krishna, Reality

the Beautiful. When we become conscious of that, then we will understand things in truth. At present we are covered in Maya (illusion). Maya means we don't know what is what, but when we become purified we will understand what is what, we will realize that what there is is Krishna," Sripad Puri Maharaj explained.

Revant Prabhu followed-up with, "Right now by my sitting here, I can understand what Krishna consciousness is but the vision of the material world does not go away." "That is called material conditioning, therefore, we are required to practice sadhana (devotion)," Sripad Puri Maharaj responded. Sadhana-bhakti (practice of devotion) allows us to practice Krishna consciousness. Remembering Krishna in everything we do. When we cook we cook for Krishna, when we talk, we talk about Krishna. When we do anything we do it for Krishna. That helps us to remember Krishna in everything we are doing even though we may not see Krishna but at least we are engage in Krishna's service."

The next question asked was "How long do we have to keep on practicing Krishna's service?" "Now, that's up to Krishna. When He sees that our hearts are sincere and with the mercy of gurudev we can get that actual vision of Krishna," Sripad Puri Maharaj responded. "So does that mean we are born this way or are materialistic things influencing us," Sobha Mandava asked. "You are first born this way," Sripad Puri Maharaj responded. "To be born means to be influenced by material nature otherwise why would we take birth in this material world?"

Revant Prabhu then asked, "When a person is born in a very holy place, is it his nature to be religious or is it something he acquires as he grows up?" "Only one who has developed his Krishna consciousness in his previous lives to a certain extent, will begin from there in his next life. So those who take birth in the holy places, they are very exalted souls because they have so much opportunity to progress further in their spiritual lives. We pray for that opportunity," Sripad Puri Maharaj continued. "We pray that we may progress in this life as much as possible then to take birth in a family of devotees or in the holy places. That would be the fulfillment of this life and we would go on from there and hope that one day we may be fully Krishna conscious. We will be seeing Krishna in every moment and engage in activities serving Him in the spiritual plane. That is the objective and it comes when we developed Krishna *prema* (Love for Krishna)," Sripad Puri Maharaj continued. "When our Krishna *prema*, love for Krishna is awakened we cannot live without Him for a second, then He may take pity on us. We are told that by simply pleasing gurudev and dedicating our life to his service, Krishna will reciprocate through guru and give us that same Krishna consciousness. "

“Who is gurudev” Revant Prabhu asked? “One who teaches us or gives us transcendental knowledge and detachment from this world! One who gives us Krishna consciousness and engages us in the service of Krishna, is guru,” Sripad Puri Maharaj responded. “Ultimately Krishna is guru. He comes to teach us. Krishna says *acaryam mam vijaniyan.*” This is confirmed in the Śrīmad Bhāgavatam 11.17.27

*ācāryamī 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. “

“Everything is Krishna ultimately but we cannot see that, but through guru we can see that more easily. When we come to full Krishna consciousness, we will know ‘*vasudevah sarvam iti*’ Krishna is everything. There is no place where Krishna is not. It is only our forgetfulness.” *Bhagavad Gita - The Hidden Treasure of the Sweet Absolute*, 7. 19 confirms this:

*bahunam janmanam ante
jnanavan mam prapadyate
vasudevah sarvam 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.”

As a follow-up question, Revant Prabhu asked, “So if a person has vices, then he cannot be Krishna conscious?” In response, Sripad Puri Maharaj said, “Vices mean you have some material hankering. So if that is the case, Krishna will give that to you, but if you have hankering for Him, He will give Himself to you. It is said in the *Bhagavad Gita* (4.11) *ye yatha mam prapadyante / tams tathaiva bhajamy aham* – It means ‘as you surrender to Me, I reward you accordingly.’” *Bhagavad Gita* 4.11 confirms this:

*ye yatha mam prapadyante
tams tathaiva bhajamy aham*

*mama vartmanuvartante
manusyah partha sarvasah*

“Howsoever people surrender to Me, I accordingly reward them. Being the ultimate goal of all paths, I am the objective to be attained by all. O Pārtha, all men follow My various paths.”

“So Krishna awards you according to your surrender to Him and if you don’t surrender to Him, He also rewards you with that. You can’t get anything without Krishna’s sanction. If Krishna sees you wanting something sincerely, He will give that to you if you have done your *tapasya* (penance), or if you work very hard to get Krishna, He will also give Himself to you.” Sripad Puri Maharaj continued. “By His grace, not so much by our hard work but by His grace He will give Himself when He sees we are trying so hard –just as He allowed Mother Yasoda to bind Him with her rope as Damodara. But He rarely gives Himself. He will easily give you material things if you want it but Himself, that becomes very rare.”

The next question posed was, who as a complete person has achieved Krishna? “We have many saints in the past that have achieved Krishna consciousness. Srila Prabhupada is one, Srila Krishna das Kaviraj Goswami, Srila Bhakti Vinod Thakur, Srila Saraswati Thakur. These are saints who have achieved and taught us Krishna consciousness,” Sripad Puri Maharaj responded.

“We know that Krishna is there, but still sometimes we take matters into our own hands. Why do we do that?” Sobha ji asked. “We are born in a material conception of life and that’s why we are conditioned to act in the material world. From the time we were born, all the people we are surrounded by, they acted like that, so we also learned to act like that. But when we live in the company of the saints and associate with them, then we will learn those higher habits also and give up our ordinary mundane habits.” Sripad Puri Maharaj responded. “Once we take shelter under guru and the devotees, try to live in the same way they are living, then we will learn how to think and do things differently. Just like we learned all our habits from those whom we are living with. By the association we have, of course we are encouraged to do those things by them. But in the spiritual company, *sadhu sanga*, we learn how to do things in Krishna consciousness – always serving, always thinking of Krishna and putting everything in His hands, surrendering to Him. Krishna says, *sarva-dharman parityajya / mam ekam saranam vraja* – surrender to Me.’ We can do that [surrender to Krishna] at any stage of our life but it becomes easier in the company of the devotees.” *Bhagavad Gita - The Hidden Treasure of the Sweet Absolute*, 18.66 confirms this:

*sarva-dharman parityajya
mam ekam saranam vraja
aham toam sarva-papebhyo
moksaisyami ma sucah*

“Give up all kinds of religion and surrender to Me alone. I will liberate you from all sins, do not despair.”

“Practically, how do you achieve such company?” Revant Prabhu asked, to which Sripad Puri Maharaj responded, “in the Ashram (a spiritual hermitage) of Gurudeva.” Revant Prabhu wanted to know if a regular person can stay at the ashram and for how long, to which Sripad Puri Maharaj said, “You can stay there for a week, a day, a year or your whole life.”

He then mentioned that there are several ashrams in the USA. Among them are those of ISKCON^[1] and SCSMath,^[2] located on the West Coast. “If Krishna gives us the facilities and if we have enough people, then we can have one here also, but it is not necessary to have a formal ashram. We can have association just like we have here, where we come and have *satsang* (association) with the other devotees. We can also have *satsang* at anyone’s house. All he need is a little altar, invite the devotees, have *Hari Katha* (discussion about Lord Krishna) and serve some simple *prasadam* (food first offered to Sri Krishna). Like that you can cultivate within your own house. In an ashram they have the *mandir* (temple) and the deities that becomes a little more intense type of service. Anyhow do what you can and Krishna will appreciate what you are doing. He will help you. Don’t get discouraged, don’t lose faith and keep associating with the devotees. It’s a very simple and sublime process. You come chant Hare Krsna, hear *Hari Katha*, take *prasadam* and be happy.”

“But not everyone can come,” Revant Prabhu said. “Why not?” Sripad Puri Maharaj countered. “Everyone can come, even an animal can come and hear and take Krishna *prasadam*, so why not?” “If that is the case, what if someone has too much karma?” Revant asked. “We are all fallen souls, but we can all join *sanga* for purification,” Sripad Puri Maharaj responded. “We are fallen souls, so we want to come, get some help and become purified. We may not achieve perfection in this life but whatever progress we can make in this life will help us in our future lives. Our spiritual bank account will fill up and when it reaches enough, then we can understand things in a higher way. We have to keep trying. *Prayascita* means something like atonement – at-one-ment and our atonement is service to Krishna, to be at-one with Krishna’s Will and we do that by serving Him,” Sripad Puri Maharaj continued. “So as soon as we can serve Krishna, then all our problems will fall to the background. We have to have strong faith,

determination and good association with the devotees, then we can make progress and feel satisfied in what we are doing”

The next question posed was, how do we know how much progress we are making? “We will know by how much we become detached from the material things in life. That is how we measure our spiritual progress,” Sripad Puri Maharaj responded. “Then you start looking and behaving different from other people,” Sobha ji countered. “That is because we are always looking for approval from others. But the devotee doesn’t care for that. The devotees has some indifference to the world. He develops that. Why? Because he has a higher taste, something higher that he is interested in than the material things of this world,” Sripad Puri Maharaj responded. “When we get the higher taste then the lower taste doesn’t interest us anymore. When we are so concerned with the world, then how could we be thinking of God? But when you remember Krishna you don’t think about anything else. A devotee is most satisfied just thinking about Krishna. Thinking about anything else is like a misery, unhappiness.”

“How do you think about Krishna?” Revant Prabhu asked. “By His service,” Sripad Puri Maharaj responded. “The most important thing in our spiritual lives is to have the service of Gurudev. Like for instance, myself, Srila Prabhupada told me to preach this message of how life comes from life. I spend my whole life trying to think of how to do that. It was a very practical thing for me. As a scientist I can try to present that philosophy to others in various scientific ways. Somehow or the other that engages me fully, inspires me to come here and try to start some educational facility here. So like that we fill our lives with the service of guru. Guru’s instruction is the same as Krishna’s instructions. By fulfilling guru’s instruction, we are fulfilling the desire of Krishna. Devotees when they have some actual higher taste of the higher things, he doesn’t like to do lower things, he wouldn’t find it tasteful. He is always looking to find some place where some *sadhu-sanga* is, where there’s a mandir or find time to worship Krishna in his own home. In that way keeping himself always engaged in remembering Krishna and he feels happy and satisfied in that.”

Sripad Puri Maharaj continued, “Anyone, anywhere, in any circumstances can chant Hare Krishna. Meditate on Krishna. Krishna is there in His name. So there’s no reason for not remembering Krishna. Mahaprabhu^[3] made it so easy, all you have to do is chant Hare Krishna and immediately you can become Krishna conscious, for that moment at least.”



L to R: Revant ji, Sripad Bhakti Madhava Puri Maharaj, Kushum devi dasi and Rasaraja das Prabhu

Prasadam was served and honored by all.

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

[2] <http://scsmath.com/> - Founded by Founder-President-Acharya, Srila B.R. Sridhar Maharaj

[3] 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.

More on Sripad Maharaj can be found at:

http://www.bhaktiswarupadamodara.com/bhagseva/bhag_seva_1.html

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