Sri Sri Guru Gaurangau Jayatah

Bhakti Vedanta Institute
Princeton University Harinama
Princeton, NJ

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A few minutes before Sripad Bhakti Madhava Puri Maharaj, Ph.D (Sripad Puri Maharaj) arrived at the Princeton Bhakti Vedanta Institute's (BVI) office, the New York devotees were discussing how Srila Govinda Maharaj[1] was selected as the Sevaite-President-Acharya of Sri Chaitanya Saraswat Math (SCS Math) and also how Srila Acharya Maharaj[2] was selected as the Successor Sevaite-President-Acharya of SCS Math. "Both Srila Govinda Maharaj and Srila Acharya Maharaj were selected by their Gurudev (spiritual teacher) to be the successor of the Math in a similar way," Rasaraja das Prabhu said. "Their selection was not based only on their qualification but on the connection they shared with their Gurudev. Srila Sridhar Maharaj [3] selected Srila Govinda Maharaj before he left the body. After a few months of joining the Math Srila Acharya Maharaj, I believe, was selected by Srila Govinda Maharaj to be his successor. There is a very divine connection between them maybe from their previous births." We also discussed the importance of service to Gurudev and the Vaisnavas. Joining our discussion, Sripad Puri Maharaj added, "We may also understand it to be the Divine Will since Krishna says '*ācāryaṁ māṁ vijānīyān'*." This is confirmed in the *Śrīmad Bhāgavatam* 11.17.27

ācāryaṁ māṁ 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."

Opening our memorial sanga in honor of Srila Govinda Maharaj, Sripad Puri Maharaj said, "One important quality of Srila Govinda Maharaj was his very affectionate nature. He always showed so much affection toward all the devotees. This was the most illustrious quality, I thought, of all of his characteristics. A sweet affection for each of us was felt when we were in his company. A very sweet personality although he also became very angry sometimes at the gundas (ruffians) when they were coming to disturb Srila Guru Maharaj. [2] One time it seemed that Guru Maharaj had to remind him 'Don't become so angry at them. Treat them also with affection. You don't want to make your enemies your enemy, you want to make them your friends,'" Sripad Puri Maharaj said laughingly. "I remember he went up to tell Guru Maharaj about those who were making some distubance in the Math and after he come downstairs, he was talking with them very affectionately while walking them out the gate of the Math," Sripad Puri Maharaj continued. "He was talking to them, smiling and very nicely as he walked them out the gate."





“I know when we first came to the Math, Govinda Maharaja and all the devotees were very affectionate to us, providing us a place to stay and something to eat. He was most gracious, making the devotees feel comfortable, very much at home and welcome,” Sripad Puri Maharaj said. “I remembered the first time I came to the Math, Srila Guru Maharaj was sitting outside on his veranda, looking very simple and sublime. I had heard so many things about Srila Sridhar Maharaj from what Srila Prabhupada had said so I knew he was a pure viasnava we can take guidance from. Srila Prabhupada said Srila Sridhar Maharaj was even his *siksha* (instructing) guru, what to speak of what we could learn from him.”

Sripad Puri Maharaj then said, “We have much affection for Srila Sridhar Maharaj but it was Srila Govinda Maharaj who was taking such affectionate care of us when we were coming there. He made the approach easier to Srila Guru Maharaj by his grace, his mercy and his affection. The relationship between Govinda Maharaj and Guru Maharaj reminded me of the relationship between Nityananda Prabhu and Mahaprabhu. Mahaprabhu was a little bit more exclusive in his later years to select devotees and intimate friends, but Nityananda was very accommodating he would invite everyone, so like that I had a connection with Guru Maharaj through Govinda Maharaj. Govinda Maharaj was always an important part of our connection with Srila Sridhar Maharaj. Later on the devotees who did not know Srila Sridhar Maharaj but only Govinda Maharaj could only indirectly know that divine connection between them.”

“Srila Guru Maharaj also mentioned that it was Srila Govinda Maharaj’s desire to let other disciples of Srila Prabhupada come to the Math, otherwise Guru Maharaj felt he wasn’t able to preach to them, accommodating them and properly care for them because of his age and delicate health. It was not his nature to be so expansive but because Govinda Maharaj promised that he would take care of us all, Guru Maharaj began to preach to us,” Sripad Puri Maharaj continued. “Govinda Maharaj was always managing everything. He had all the guest houses built for us, he managed even the building of the Mandir (temple) for Guru Maharaj. It was Govinda Maharaj’s energy, his intelligence, his devotion that the Math was established the way it was and later on Srila Acharya

Maharaj helped to build all the different buildings they have there now with the expanded arrangements for the devotees to stay. The big pandals that were constructed before all those buildings were erected was done by Srila Acharya Maharaj, even the food distribution he was organizing under Srila Govinda Maharaj's direction. So like that, there is this symbiotic relation between Srila Govinda Maharaj, Srila Sridhar Maharaj, Srila Acharya Maharaj and off course all the devotees. All contributed some way or other. We see that all as the transcendental arrangement of the Lord."

"When the devotees asked Srila Prabhupada what was the vision of Guru, he replied that the Guru sees everyone as his Guru," Sripad Puri Maharaja said. "When someone comes forward to help Guru, he considers it as his Guru coming to help him, to engage and encourage him in devotional service to the Lord. He does not think of others as ordinary persons but rather as his Guru coming to help him. He thinks that 'by the mercy of my Guru, he's sending these angels to encourage me in my service.'"

"It is possible if one has complete dedication to Gurudeva, just like the Gopis (cowherd girls) who were so attached to Krishna that when He was not there, they were seeing Krishna in everything. They were even embracing the trees thinking they were Krishna because of their blackish color. They could not get Krishna out of their minds even for a second," Sripad Puri Maharaj continued. "I heard Srila Govinda Maharaj once say that in the presence of Guru you see him in his particular form. But in the absence of Guru, you see him everywhere. Disciples who are dedicated to serving Guru never forget him for a moment. A genuine devotee never seeks to glorify himself because he is always engaged in serving Guru, to satisfy and honor him. That is why we put 'All glories to Sri Guru and Gauranga' at the head of anything that we do. If we have become actual servants of Guru and Krishna then we will naturally hold Guru first, foremost and always in our mind."

"False ego refers to how much we are not surrendered. To the degree that our identity is not established in the mood of surrender and service to Guru, to that degree we are influenced by false ego," Sripad Puri Maharaj said. He then asked the assembled devotees "What is humility? " In response Syamasundara das Prabhu said, "What you've just said Maharaj, taking yourself out of the equation and accepting Guru wholesale. You are not interested in your particular take on things." Rasaraja das Prabhu replied, "Follow what the Guru says and satisfy Guru's instruction." Kushum Devi then said, "Serving the Guru and the devotees. Taking instructions and rendering service to the devotees and Guru, I feel is humility." "How does one become humble?" was Sripad Puri Maharaj's follow-up question. "Kill the ego" Kushum Devi responded. "How do you do that?" Sripad Puri Maharaj pressed further. "Faith and trust" Syamasundara das Prabhu responded. "*Saranagati*, surrender to Krishna," Rasaraja das Prabhu said.

"When I was asked 'how to become humble?' I answered 'by Krishna's mercy.' By the mercy of Guru and Krishna, if one can actually develop some love for Krishna then all the qualities of a devotee are manifest automatically– kindness, humility, fixed in the Absolute, silent, friendly, poetic -- those twenty-six (26) qualities of a devotee[4] Sripad Puri Maharaj said. "Humility is the natural quality of the soul, so the soul is only

manifesting its' actual spiritual form (*svarup*). It is very difficult to develop those qualities if someone independently tries to do it, but they come naturally to a devotee when genuine Krishna *prema* awakens through devotion, love, and affection for Guru. Guru is Krishna coming to us in a particular human form so *guru-bhakti* and *Krishna-bhakti* is the same. Once that devotion is actually awakened then those qualities will automatically appear, not that any separate endeavor is needed." In his purport to *Srimad-Bhagavatam* (5.18.12), Srila Prabhupada listed the twenty-six (26) qualities of a devotee.

"Srila Guru Maharaj said he tried to live by himself after Srila Bhakti Siddhanta Saraswati[5] left his body. He didn't want to have disciples or anything like that. He first went to Eckachakra to ask Lord Nityananda Prabhu for His mercy to be able to live in Nabadwip. Later he realized that if he was asking Lord Nityananda for His mercy but not giving mercy to others, it was hypocritical"

"From then on he thought, 'I have to do some relief work,'" Rasaraja das Prabhu said.

"Yes. Srila Guru Maharaj thought about the example of a doctor. A doctor doesn't know everything. People come to him, he doesn't know exactly what they have. Based on their symptoms he tries his best from what he knows to help them. If every doctor has to wait until he knew everything there would be no doctors. People would not be able to approach any doctor, so like that a doctor has to go out and try to do his best with what he knows," Sripad Puri Maharaj said of Srila Guru Maharaj's thoughts.

To illustrate the importance of sharing the knowledge received from gurudev and the devotees Sripad Puri Maharaj gave several examples. One such example was the mango tree that has lots of fruits on it but was inaccessible due to the property's fence around it. "The fruits fell to the ground and not even the birds went to eat those mangoes. It was told that in the previous life that tree was a Brahman. He had all this knowledge but would not share that knowledge with anyone, so he was cursed to take birth as that mango tree and no one will take the fruits," Sripad Puri Maharaj said. In another example to demonstrate a devotee's humility he said, "A devotee doesn't feel qualified to tell others about spiritual knowledge because whatever he has, he feels 'I am not qualified, I am not pure, my words will not help anybody. I am limited and condtioned, my words are contaminated, so what kind of benefit will anyone have from hearing what I have to say.'"

After these talks about Gurudeva, we turned to the picture of Srila Govinda Maharja on the *Vyasasana* to honor him . Led by Rasaraja das Prabhu he sang "*Sri Guru Vandana*" [7] by Narottama Dasa Thakura, followed by a very lively rendition of the Panca Tattva mantra and the Maha Mantra by Sripad Puri Maharaj. We then offered flowers (*pushpanjali*) to Srila Govinda Maharaj.





Part of the audience enjoying Harinama Sankirtana with Sripad Puri Maharaj

In a brief description of Srila Govinda Maharaj, Sripad Puri Maharaj said, "Today we are celebrating the Vyasa Puja of Srila Bhakti Sundara Govinda Maharaj. He is the *sannyas* and *diksha* disciple of Srila Bhakti Rakshaka Sridhar Maharaj. He became the Acharya of the Math in 1988 just before Srila Guru Maharaj left his physical presence in this world. Of course he is always in his spiritual form." Rasaraja das Prabhu then read the obeisances (*Pranam Mantra)*[8] to Srila Govinda Maharaj written by Srila Sridhar Maharaj followed by a brief talk. Sripad Puri Maharaj then asked Rasaraja das Prabhu if he would like to say something about Srila Govinda Maharaj.

"In the scriptures, what we realized from Srila Bhakti Siddhanta Saraswati, Srila Guru Maharaj, Srila Govinda Maharaj, Srila Acharya Maharaj is that devotion to guru is more important than devotion to Krishna, and the reason for that is Krishna Himself said to Uddhava (Sri Krishna's friend) 'the love I have for you is more than I have for Myself.' So Krishna has more love for His devotees than Himself. Krishna said that if something were to happen to His devotees He will go in front to protect His devotees," Rasaraja das Prabhu said. "When we celebrate the Vyasa Puja of the Guru, it's a more important event that celebrating *Janmasthami* (Krishna's birthday) because for us the Guru is the most approachable way to Krishna. Guru is the human form of Krishna. Krishna says '*ācāryaṁ māṁ vijānīyān' - Śrīmad Bhāgavatam* 11.17.27. Krishna appears as the *acharya* (spiritual leader). So the way that we can relate to Krishna is through the Guru."

"We don't follow a person that claims to be a guru rather we follow *Brahma Madhava Sampradaya* (line) which is the line from Lord Brahma, so we are connected to Krishna through this *sampradaya*. The instructions we get from guru we have to understand are the same as coming from Krishna, so that is why we have to see the guru like a transparent medium. We have to see Krishna behind guru, so when guru gives instructions to the disciple, we have to follow as if it were the same as Krishna wants me to do," Rasaraja das Prabhu continued. "The same way a wife has to be faithful to the husband, the same way a disciple has to be faithful to the guru. In that way the spiritual knowledge will come to my heart through the guru. When we cannot see guru physically, we have to follow his instructions through his books and his lectures he left. Srila Guru

Maharaj also said, we try to pray to Krishna and the point where the soul is connected with Krishna that is Guru. Guru is the representative of Krishna."

Referring to the Guru Mantra *(Guru Brahma Gurur Visnu Guru Devo Maheshwarah Guru Sakshat Param Brahman Tasmai Sri Gurave Nahama*) Amit ji said, "So guru is the supreme Lord in this form." "We have the genuine guru and the cheating guru also," Rasaraja das Prabhu said. "It is said that by the mercy of Krishna you will find a real guru and by the mercy of guru you find Krishna, so they are interdependent."

"What happens to a disciple whose feelings for his guru are very pure but the guru himself is not the correct person?" Amit ji asked. "If they don't have enough *sukriti* (pious merits) they cannot have access to a genuine guru. Rasaraja das Prabhu said. "A person who connects with a guru who is not genuine, doesn't have enough *sraddha* and *sukriti*. Maybe he has good intention but it's not connected to the right person, so the result is not good either."

"It could also have to do with his past karma," Amit ji followed-up with. Sripad Puri Maharaj responded that it mostly has to do with us. "If one is sincere, even an unqualified guru may help us." He gave the example of Bilvamangal Thakur, a saint, who became illusioned and attached to a prostitute, Chintamani. Continuing the story he said, "She told him that if he had as much attachment to Krishna as he had to her, he would be a great devotee. He then realized that he was supposed to be thinking about Krishna but instead he was thinking of this beautiful lady and wanted to have some relationship with her, so he thought 'these eyes they are always attracted to see something beautiful and I become so attract to them when they were supposed to see Krishna only.' He took a sharp object and pierced his eyes out. In this way he took Chintamani not as a prostitute but as his guru because she taught him this kind of attraction is not good. He accepted her as giving him liberation from his wrong vision." Sripad Puri Maharaj concluded, "In the *Srimad Bhagavtam*, Lord Dattatreya saw everything as a guru because from the dog, he learned loyalty, from the tree he learned tolerance, from the grass he learned humility. So for one who has that sincere desire to learn about Krishna, then guru is everywhere. Guru will appear to us if we have that genuine desire to know about Krishna and how to become a devoted soul unto him. Then Krishna will come in the form of Guru to help us."



My humble dandavats to Sripad Shanta Maharaj for assisting me with Srila Govinda Maharaj's favorite *prasadam*, which 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

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[1] Srila Bhakti Sundar Govinda Dev-Goswami Maharaj - Srila B.S. Govinda Maharaj, Sevaite-President-Acharya Sri Chaitanya Saraswat Math
[2] Srila Acharya Maharaj: http://scsmath.com/docs/acharya_maharaj.html
[3] Srila Sridhar Maharaj/Guru Maharaj - Srila Bhakti Raksak Sridhar Dev-Goswami Maharaj - Founder-President-Acharya: Sri Chaitanya Saraswat Math
[4] International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON) http://iskcon.org/
[5] Twenty-six (26) qualities of a devotee http://www.vedabase.net/sb/5/18/12/en1
[6] Srila Bhaktisiddhanta Saraswati Thakur - http://www.scsmath.com/docs/saraswati_thakur.html
[7] Sri Guru Vandana - http://scsmath.org/trove2/kirttanguide4th.pdf (pdf - page 65)
[8] Pranam Mantra - http://www.scsmath.com/docs/govinda_maharaj.html

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