



PRINCETON BHAKTI VEDANTA INSTITUTE REPORT - NOVEMBER 26, 2016

Bhakti Vedanta Institute
of Spiritual Culture and Science
20 Nassau St., Ste. 116
Princeton, NJ 08542
Phone 732-604-4135
Website: bviscs.org

Faith, Certainty, Truth, and Love

Our *sadhu sanga* began with an enthusiastic *kirtan* with Rasaraja das Prabhu on mrdanga (percussion instrument), Syamasundara das Prabhu on guitar, Sringara Mataji and Sripad Bhakti Madhava Puri Maharaja, Ph.D. (Sripad Puri Maharaja) on kartals. We were then joined by Nila Madhava das Prabhu on mrdanga with his daughter, Madhavi Devi on kartals, and guests, Jonah, Sobha and Dorothy.



Syamasundara Prabhu, Rasaraja Prabhu, Sripad Puri Maharaja, Jonah and Nila Madhava Prabhu

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

Sri Krishna says, "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."
Śrīmad Bhāgavatam 11.17.27

Sripad Puri Maharaja began speaking with the devotees, "Krishna appears in unlimited forms as Guru to teach us about Himself. As Srila A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada explained in 1936:

'... when we speak of the fundamental principle of gurudeva or acharyadeva, we speak of something that is of universal application.

There does not arise any question of discriminating my guru from yours or anyone else's. There is only one guru, who appears in an infinity of forms to teach you, me and all others.'

"Guru is not a teacher of ordinary knowledge that we can learn from any teacher of a mundane subject. The knowledge gurudeva bestows is *divya jnana*, divine or transcendental knowledge. Such knowledge is like a two-edged sword: it cuts attachment to the material world and opens a connection to the spiritual, transcendental world. Depending upon how much one has been graced with spiritual surrender that realization can be imparted to others who are searching for Divinity, Sri Krishna Reality the Beautiful."



Madhavi devi, Sringara Mata, Nitai, Sobha, Syamasundara Prabhu, Rasaraja Prabhu

"*Kirtan* is the chanting of mantras that contain the holy Names of Krishna and activities or pastimes in relation to Him. They provide a beautiful way to meditate or focus our attention on the transcendental sound vibration that originates all worlds," Sripad Puri Maharaja explained. "The material world has its origin, but not from a big bang as the modern scientists try to tell us. The big bang doesn't really explain how people and all other living entities come from an explosion. The Vedas (ancient scriptures of India) teach that the transcendental origin of all types of creations is supremely sentient and therefore also has personality."

“René Descartes (French philosopher, mathematician, and scientist), dubbed the father of modern western philosophy, said *cogito ergo sum* ‘(I think, thus I am)’. He famously said *de omnibus dubitandum* ‘I doubt everything’ but I cannot doubt that I am because even if I doubt that I am, I would still be the doubter who doubts that,” Sripad Puri Maharaja explained. “He withdrew his certainty of all exterior reality and retreated wholly into the certainty of his interior self as a thinking being. Thinking is evidence of being and being is evidence of thinking. Thinking and being were united for him as thinking being. Generally we consider there’s a difference between the two because ‘being’ doesn’t think, but since he was saying ‘I think, thus I am (being)’ thus he is saying that ‘I am being that thinks.’ He is not talking about being an empirical body. Abstracting from all external empirical experience and withdrawing into pure thought he finds thinking and being are united. They are different but united as one - one and different.”

“Thinking-being is called consciousness, which can be conceived within finite subjectivity or the pure universality of thinking and being. Descartes didn’t specify what that thinking was about, but of course every time we think we have to think about something - we have to be specific or determinate. Descartes was thinking purely in terms of thinking itself – thinking about thinking as being there to think about. Thinking about other things was a secondary matter. He was called a dualist for that reason. So he made a division between the internal or subjective thinking, the *res cogitans*, and the external (extended, spatial) or objective world of matter, which he called the *res extensa*. That which is spatial is different from that which is thought. Yet everyone can understand that there’s a connection between these two. What is spatial is also what we think is there, otherwise what would we think if there was no world? What would be there to think about,” Sripad Puri Maharaja asked his attentive audience then responded, “Thinking and the world are not totally disconnected. They are related but he (Descartes) didn’t understand the direct connection although he tried to establish their connection through God, so he ended up with a dual reality – an internal world of thinking and another world of external or extended matter. The Dutch philosopher Baruch Spinoza (1632-1677) later tried to reconcile this duality within his One Absolute Substance or God that was more fundamental than matter with infinite attributes, two of which were thought and extension.”

“We may generally think that things (bodies) are in space but Descartes was saying that ‘bodies are spatial.’ In other words, for him matter by nature is spatial not that there’s a space and then there are material things that fill it; rather things themselves are spatial – they are made up of space. What Descartes meant by spatial or extension is that space was matter. He also thought that this matter had an initial motion so that vortexes (vortices) in space caused material bodies to form. This is interesting because Einstein (Albert Einstein, a German-born theoretical physicist), also thought that matter could be explained on the basis of the warp or curvature of space (actually a mathematical space). So he got back to an idea similar to Descartes but in a completely different way.”



L to R: Sobha, Prabhu: Syamasundara and Rasaraja, Sripad Puri Maharaja, Jonah and Nila Madhava Prabhu during sanga

“However, in the Vedic tradition it is understood that thinking and things are related and the creation develops from subtle to gross. In the *Bhagavad-Gita* 3.42 the hierarchy is explained

*indriyani parany ahur
indriyebhyah param manah
manasas tu para buddhir
yo buddheh paratas tu sah*

It is said by the wise that the senses are superior to matter, the mind is superior to the senses, and the intelligence is superior to the mind, and the soul is superior to even the intelligence.”

“The senses determine that distinct things exist but there’s no sense that judges or compares, for instance, that this thing is ‘next to’ that thing. There’s no sense organ that determines ‘next to.’ Eyes can see this or that, but it is not the eyes that compare or judge that one thing is next to another. So where does this ‘next to’ come from?” Sripad Puri Maharaja asked. “The mind,” Rasaraja das Prabhu responded. “Yes. The mind has the function to judge, to compare. The senses detect that objects ‘are’ there but to compare them, to take the data of the senses and compare them is the function of the mind or specifically what is called understanding.”

“In robotics photoelectric cells serve the function of the eyes for a robot. A photoelectric cell generates an electric current whenever a photon of light hits a receptor inside the cell. This is the same principle that is used in solar panels that generate electricity from the Sun. The eyes are thought to operate in the same way. They detect photons of light then generate some current in the optic nerve which then stimulates the occipital region of the brain. Then what? How does an electric current allow you to see or understand an object all of a sudden? How do you know which objects to go toward or avoid? Where is all of this coming from? This is not just coming from the eyes, or the photoelectric cell in robots. So the mind is essential to the sensuous perception of the world of things,” Sripad Puri Maharaja responded. “Robots don’t have minds but they have computers that are pre-programmed to perform certain tasks by activating what are called its servo-motors whenever electrical input is received from its sensors.”

“There is still another faculty that takes the judgements that are made by the understanding and determines what the consequences of such judgements will be. This is called the intelligence. So there are the senses, the mind, and the intelligence and then the factor that integrates it all together called the ego (*atman*). The ego integrates all of the former

processes into one individual with many experiences. Yet above the ego is still another plane that is called *atman*. Ego refers to an isolated, separated individual. *Atman* is above that - it knows itself as a particular instance or instantiation of *Brahman* (Spirit). When the *atman* realizes itself as part of a greater whole than itself it is called a 'moment' because *Brahman* is a dynamic, living or universal thinking-being, universal consciousness," Sripad Puri Maharaja explained. "As universal it can be thought of as all-accommodating *Brahman*, or all-pervading *Paramatma* (particular aspect), or as unifying, all-attractive *Bhagavan* (individual or singular aspect). Krishna is the all-attractive Truth and from Him comes everything else."

Diving deeper into today's discussion on faith, certainty and truth Sripad Puri Maharaja asked his attentive audience "What is faith" and "Does everyone have faith?"

"Faith is having a strong belief in my heart and mind in something greater than myself. Trust and faith seems interconnected to me," guest, Jonah responded.

"Yes, it is like surrender for me," responded Sobha.

"It is like a trust. Trusting something that is beyond your control," Rasaraja das Prabhu said.

"For me, faith in my God, faith in friendship but in spirituality it is faith in God. Faith is very important in our life," Dorothy said.



Sripad Puri Maharaja, Jonah, Dorothy, Prabhu: Syamasundara, Nila Madhava, Rasaraja

"In philosophy faith is also considered a type of knowledge - we have to know or have an idea of that in which we have faith. So to have faith in something is not without knowledge, although such knowledge may be implicit in faith. Knowledge that is implicit is called certainty, or the immediacy or beginning of knowledge. When we are certain of that which we cannot see, then such certainty is internal and is called faith. When we are certain of something external it is called sense-certainty or apprehension. In either case it is intuition of either an internal (faith) or external (sense certainty) nature. Such intuitions don't depend on proof or explicit knowledge."

"In the Bible, *Hebrews* 11.1 faith is described as 'confidence in what we hope for and certainty in what we cannot see.' Whatever we hope for can be fulfilled in the higher ideal in which we have faith, even though we don't experience it now in the world in which we live. Once Srila

Bhakti Rakshak Sridharadev Goswami Maharaja explained that OM means 'Yes' – that perfection you hope for does exist!"

"Srila Sridhara Maharaja has explained faith as *bhagavad-bhaktitah sarvam* 'the conviction that all success can be achieved by serving Krishna' in his *Prapanna Jivanamrta* verse 1.35

*bhagavad-bhaktitah sarvam
ity utsrjya vidher api
kainkaryam krsna-padaika
srayatvam saranagatih*

Being governed by the faith that all success is achieved by serving the Supreme Lord, to abandon servitude even to scriptural injunctions and take exclusive refuge in the lotus feet of Sri Krishna in every time, place, and circumstance, is known as *saranagati* -- unconditional surrender.

"In this case faith is surrender, just as Sobha mentioned."

"Actually all knowledge begins with or is based on faith. Scientists call it axioms or principles, but these are basically unproven presuppositions. The scientist has faith that if he applies his reason to the world he can find some laws or intelligible order to it, implying his belief in its rational structure. Where did that rationality of law in the world come from," Sripad Puri Maharaja asked then responded. "Historically in the West science came from religion which automatically accepts that the world is a creation of a supremely rational being. Reason cannot be impersonal. If God creates this world, there must be reason behind or within it. So science actually believes that there is reason in the world but they ignore that presumption or faith. They have lost sight of the rational essence that must be behind everything including their own rational nature. They have separated themselves from that just like Descartes separated thinking from the material things of the world. But law means there must be a law giver, a rational being behind the law," Sripad Puri Maharaja continued. "The conditioned souls accept the phenomenal world as contingently happening without any intelligence or purpose behind it. Yet they also believe in law and order in the universe and in their communities. They have to reconcile their conflicted view examining what they have forgotten."



Nitai, Jonah, Nila Madhava, Madhavi, Sringera during sangha with Sripad Puri Maharaja

"We have a saying in Venezuela 'Faith can move a mountain,'" Dorothy interjected. "Not only can faith move mountains, it can also make them. Did you ever hear of making a mountain out of a molehill," Sripad Puri Maharaja said smiling in response to Dorothy's comment. "Faith and knowledge are not as disconnected as people think. People think that faith is something that doesn't require knowledge, but you have to know what it is that you have faith in. That knowing is knowledge. It may not be the kind of

knowledge that is verified experimentally like scientific knowledge but it is verified internally by experience. So faith and knowledge are related. Then what type of knowledge is it that faith has?" Sripad Puri Maharaja asked then responded. "Because it is not based on anything we can see directly in the world it is a result of thought or reason that there must be something greater of which we are all a part. The idea of God may come from religious teachings or writings, but it is because it is rational thought that leads one to 'believe in God that it becomes an unshakeable faith or certainty in one's heart. Faith or internal certainty means it may not be explicitly thought out or proven, but nonetheless it is accepted as rationally true."

"The next question is how do we know that what we are certain of is the Truth?" Sripad Puri Maharaja asked as he dived into the third topic of *sadhu sangha*. "If I go to a court and say to the judge that, 'There was a chair in my room but it is not there anymore. This man was the only person in the room when I left. When I came back the chair was gone and so he must have stolen it.' What do you think the judge is going to say? "What is the proof," Rasaraja das Prabhu responded. "Yes, what is the proof, because the judge won't accept your claim on the basis of your certainty. When we can supply a proof of our certainty then that is considered the truth. Truth has to be established as an end result, not at the beginning. Truth is the result of some process then we can call it truth. It is not the thing that we start with," Sripad Puri Maharaja said. "We start with certainty but truth requires reasoning which means 'I have to get to or end at the point that I am certain of or starting with. In other words, truth is like a circle that begins and ends at the same point. This is similar to what philosophers call 'justified true belief' but Plato thought that this can be called knowledge only when applied to theological beliefs and not to mundane beliefs which are called opinions."



Dorothy asks a question while Jonah listens thoughtfully.

"Today we discussed faith, certainty and truth in a philosophical way - how they are related and how they are different. In the devotional world faith is like a seed or *bija* that gradually grows and blossoms into *prema* or divine love of God. In *Sri Chaitanya Charitamrita Madhya* 19.151 Srila Krishnadas Kaviraja writes,

*brahmāṇḍa bhramite kona bhāgyavān jīva
guru-kṛṣṇa-prasāde pāya bhakti-latā-bija*

Wandering throughout the universe (*brahmanda*) according to

their karma, fortunate jiva souls may get the opportunity to associate with guru by the grace of Krishna and receive the seed of the creeper of devotion (*bhakti lata bija*).

The different stages of that development or growth are explained by Srila Rupa Goswami in his *Bhakti-rasāmṛta-sindhu* (1.4.15-16) and recorded in *Sri Chaitanya Charitamrita Madhya* 23.14-15

*ādaḥ śraddhā tataḥ sādhu-
saṅgo 'tha bhajana-kriyā
tato 'nartha-nivṛttiḥ syāt
tato niṣṭhā rucis tataḥ
athāsaktis tato bhāvas
tataḥ premābhyudañcati
sādhakānām ayaṁ premaṇaḥ
prādurbhāve bhavet kramaḥ*

First there is firm faith in spiritual life and disinterest in material affairs, then one takes to associating with saintly persons, engaging in devotional activities with them, gradually eliminating non-devotional habits acquired from mundane life, becoming fixed in transcendental consciousness, developing taste for dedication and the devotional service world, feeling separation from devotional service when not engaged, experiencing joyful fulfilment when engaged in devotional service, and awakening *prema* or love of God as a result of those devotees who sincerely follow this gradual process.

"Srila Bhaktivinoda Thakur considered faith to be the halo (*kunti*) of Srimati Radharani Who is the Personification and Queen of the mood (*bhava*) of loving devotion to Krishna. Those souls who are the particles of that halo are eternally attracted to the service of Sri Radha and can find no satisfaction in any other service. It is through those souls that the halo of Sri Radhika shines its light into this world."

In Srila Bhakti Rakshak Sridhara Maharaja's ^[1] commentary on the *Bhagavad-Gita - The Hidden Treasure of the Sweet Absolute: chapter 10 Verse 10* the Divine Lord says,

*tesam satata-yuktanam
bhajatam priti-purvakam
dadami buddhi-yogam tam
yena mam upayanti te*

To those devotees who are always lovingly engaged in My service, I give the divine inspiration by which they can come to Me.

"*Divya jnana*, divine knowledge of how to approach Krishna is not something that is accumulated but rather revealed or given (*dadami*) as inspiration in the heart of the unwavering devotee who has given his whole hearted love (*priti-purvakam*) and devotion to the Lord. This is the reward

for one who has unflinching faith in Krishna.”



Prasadam was served and honored by all the devotees

“The topic is faith, for me it’s a state of mind and in my case, it’s faith in God. The man who has faith can resolve many problems in his life. Faith can be synonymous in some way to belief, hope and mind. I say mind because if you have faith in God, and you have so much pain or some problem, it will disappear through his faith like a miracle. I go to Church to converse with God and to fulfill my spirit. In a temple I feel connection with God. I am coming here (BVI center) almost every time, so here at this center I feel ‘yeah I am in God’s environment.’” Dorothy said.

“Srla Guru Maharaja also explains that to get some faith, *Shraddha*, you need to accumulate some *sukriti*, spiritual merits. Can you explain how people can accumulate that *sukriti*?” Rasaraja das Prabhu asked.

“When one is influenced by *sattva guna* he performs meritorious deeds, like giving in charity, feeding people, building shelters, and other moral and virtuous activities,” Sripad Puri Maharaja began to answer. “Yet although moral and virtuous acts in this world are very glorious they can only result in *anitya sukriti* (temporary merit) because they are not God-centered and thus only result in benefit within the realm of the three mundane worlds. *Nitya sukriti* is gained by acts (-*kriti* means act or do, *su* means good or glorious) in connection with the Divinity, like taking mahaprasadam, associating with and serving the devotees, hearing scriptural and devotional discourses, chanting the Holy Name, and so on. This type of *sukriti* may be of two types: *jnata sukriti* or *ajnata sukriti* – knowingly performed or unknowingly performed. If someone is feeding people, for instance, and he somehow feeds a *suddha bhakta* in the process he will get *ajnata sukriti*. He unknowingly will get spiritual benefit. But if one knows that by regularly chanting the Holy Name under direction of Gurudeva one can develop love of God he accumulates *jnata sukriti*. Still we should remember what Srla Govinda Maharaja once mentioned, even if one has an ocean of *sukriti*, without intense hankering or fervent desire one will never get Krishna *prema*.”

“Srla Sridhara Maharaja reminds us that when Mahāprabhu says,

*brahmāṇḍa bhramite kona bhāgyavān jīva
guru-kṛṣṇa-prasāde pāya bhakti-latā-bīja
(Śrī Chaitanya-charitāmṛta: Madhya-līlā, 19.151)*

Wandering throughout the material universe, the very fortunate living entity who receives the grace of Guru and Kṛṣṇa receives the seed of the creeper of devotional service.”


the word *bhāgyavān* or ‘good fortune’ means *sukriti*. It is *sukriti* that brings us in contact with faith (*śraddha*) in spiritual life. But when we have faith in the devotees (*sadhu sangha*), who are also living a life of service in a devotional God-centered community, that would give us more substantial benefit than a solitary faith in God.”



The Assembled Devotees

With this our wonderful *sadhu sangha* came to an end after *prasadam* was served and honored by all.

Srla Bhakti Nirmal Acharya Maharaja ki jai
Sripad Bhakti Madhava Puri Maharaj ki jai

Your humble servant, Kushum Devi Dasi (New York)		Donations via Pay Pal May be Sent to seva@bviscs.org
--	---	---

Footnotes:

1. Srla Bhakti Rakshak Sridhar Dev-Goswami Maharaja, *Srimad Bhagavad-Gita - The Hidden Treasure of the Sweet Absolute*, Sri Chaitanya Saraswat Math (2006).

Online Links:

Sri Chaitanya Saraswat Math, W. Bengal: <http://scsmath.org>
Our Facebook Page: <http://facebook.com/bviscs>
Previous BVI Reports: <http://bviscs.org/reports>
Sri Chaitanya Saraswat Institute: <http://scsiscs.org>