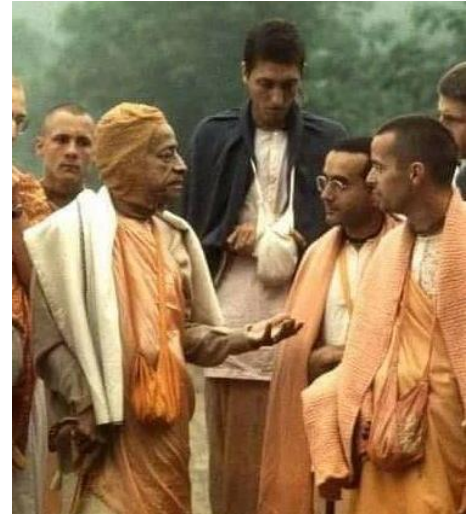


Sripad Bhakti Madhava Puri Maharaja and the Bhaktivedanta Institute

In 1970, Sripad Bhakti Madhava Puri Maharaja received his Ph. D. in theoretical chemistry from Georgetown University in Washington D.C. After a year of postdoc work at the National Bureau of Standards, Sripad Puri Maharaja joined the ISKCON temple in D.C. It was here that Sripad Puri Maharaja first met Rupanuga Prabhu, who was the GBC of Washington D.C. and Buffalo, New York temples. Rupanuga Prabhu encouraged and helped the initial formation of the Bhaktivedanta Institute. On July 5, 1972, Sripad Puri Maharaja received harinam diksha initiation from Srila A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada in the Brooklyn New York temple on Henry Street. Sripad Puri Maharaja remained at the Buffalo temple until he was given the service of heading



Rupanuga Prabhu's bus preaching program which toured the east coast visiting and preaching at different universities. It was also around this time that Prabhupada personally instructed Sripad Puri Maharaja to use his scientific background to prove that Matter comes from Life and to work cooperatively with Bhaktiswarupa Damodara Maharaja, during a morning walk in Maryland.

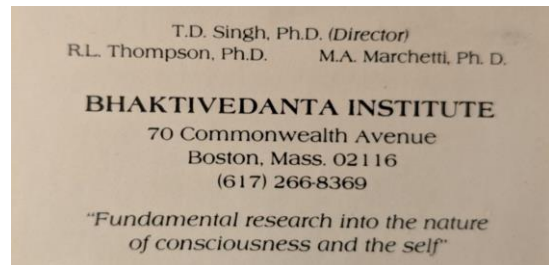


As a part of the bus preaching program's activities, Sripad Puri Maharaja was mainly in Atlanta, Georgia during the first half of 1975. During this time, at the end of February 1975, Srila Prabhupada came to the Atlanta temple and instructed his scientist disciples. This was the first time Sripad Puri Maharaja personally met Bhaktiswarupa Damodara Maharaja and Sadaputa Prabhu. Also during this time, Swarupa Damodara Maharaja was finishing his Ph. D. at Emory University. Afterwards he met with Srila Prabhupada in Vrindavan and was called into Prabhupada's room. Srila Prabhupada expressed his desire to start an academic wing of ISKCON. He asked Swarupa Damodar Maharaja to become the director of that academic wing. Maharaja suggested the name, "Bhaktivedanta Institute" and Srila Prabhupada agreed to it. Maharaja also showed Srila Prabhupada the logo of the Bhaktivedanta Institute that he had designed; Srila

Prabhupada liked it very much and instructed that the words *athato brahma jijnasa* should be added.

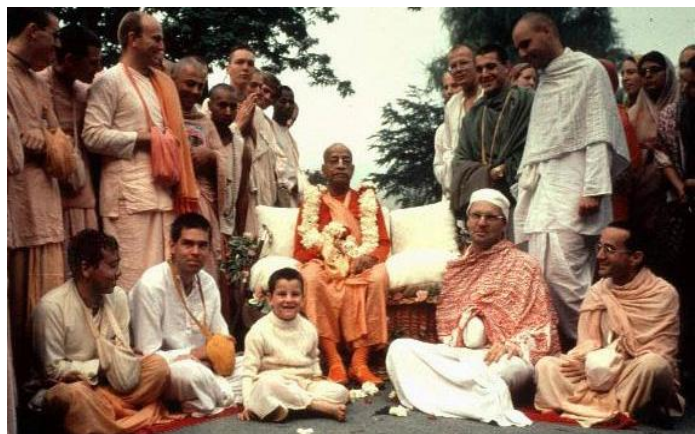
By the beginning of February 1976, Sripad Puri Maharaja began establishing the scientific preaching in Boston. In a letter from Srila Prabhupada to Rupanuga Prabhu from February 21, 1976, Srila Prabhupad wrote “He (Madhava das) is giving class at MIT, that is very good.” One such class was a lecture on “Beyond Relativity” delivered to MIT

graduate students. Later, on June 14, 1976, in a discussion between Ambarisa Prabhu and Srila Prabhupada, Sripad Puri Maharaja’s Boston preaching was acknowledged again, and it was mentioned that the Bhaktivedanta Institute was going to be established in Boston at 70 Commonwealth Ave, which Ambarisa Prabhu helped pay for. During Sripad Puri Maharaja’s preaching activities in Boston, he encountered Nobel laureate George Wald and Szent Georgi at MIT. With full faith in Srila Prabhupada’s instructions, Sripad Puri Maharaja asked them both to consider that Life and Matter come from Life. While Albert Szent-Gyorgyi responded, “No, no, no, that is too difficult,” George Wald seriously considered the idea and felt that it may be more likely. George Wald gradually came to fully embrace the idea that mind came before matter, as seen in the last lectures and publications of his lifetime, where he discussed “Life and Mind in the Universe.”

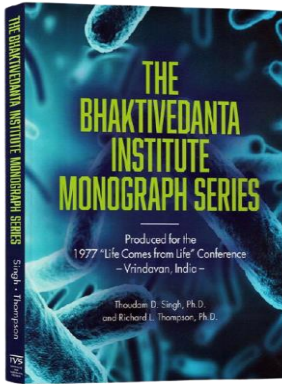


Starting in the June 1976 issue (Vol. 11 No. 6), Back To Godhead started publicizing the work of the scientist devotees to the wider ISKCON community. This BTG issue contained the article “Can Creation Come From Chaos? A challenge to the prevailing scientific view that life comes from a chance combination of material elements,” which was edited from an original paper by Sripad Puri Maharaja, Sadaputa Prabhu, and Swarupa Damodara Maharaja, as well as “Two Ph.D.’s for Krishna,” which was an interview by BTG of Sadaputa Prabhu and Sripad Puri Maharaja. This immediately influenced public opinion of the seriousness of Krishna Consciousness, as discussed

between Ramesvara Swami and Srila Prabhupada while in New York on July 9, 1976. In July 1976, Srila Prabhupada met with his scientist disciples at the Potomac, Maryland temple to further instruct them on how to preach to the scientists. During a room conversation on July 6, 1976, Prabhupada also discussed his desire for the Vedic Planetarium. Later that year, on December 10, 1976 (which was the appearance day of Srila Bhaktisiddhanta



Saraswati Thakura), the founding members of the Bhaktivedanta Institute gathered at the Potomac temple again to sign the BI charter.



From 1975 onwards, the BI's preaching was primarily based out of Boston. On August 14, 1977, the Bhaktivedanta Institute delivered a lecture series on "Atoms, Atma, & Paramatma | Origins of Life & Matter: Challenge to Chemical Evolution" at MIT. Garuda Prabhu (Graham Schweig) was also in Boston with the BI at this time. From July to September 1977, Swarupa Damodara Maharaja, Sadaputa Prabhu, and Sripad Puri Maharaja worked very hard on the monograph series which would be presented during the Life Comes from Life: First International Scientific Conference held at the Krishna Balamandir in Vrindavan, India. These three monographs were presented to Srila

Prabhupada just before the conference, which was held from October 14-16, 1977 (Friday-Sunday).

Exactly one month after the conference began, Srila Prabhupada was withdrawn from this world on November 14, 1977. Previously, in March 1977, Srila Prabhupada had indicated the importance of continuing the scientific preaching after his departure, by publicly telling Swarupa Damodara Maharaja that "The next phase is yours. You must establish our movement as a genuine scientific movement. You must preach to all the scholars and scientists very vigorously." All of these details are included in the essay "Srila Prabhupada's Vision for Bhaktivedanta Institute" originally written in 1979 by Swarupa Damodara Maharaja for *Perspectives on Bhaktivedanta Institute*. In December 1977, the events of the Life Comes from Life conference were shared with the community of worldwide devotees, through the Back To Godhead article "ISKCON Scientists Disclose Life's Origins" (Vol. 12 No. 12).

The image shows a collage of three articles from the magazine "Every Town and Village". The top article is titled "ISKCON Scientist Blasts Evolution Theory" and features a photo of Michael Manhart. The middle article is titled "Bhaktivedanta Book Sales Hit 12 Million for 1978" and features a photo of Swami Prabhupada. The bottom article is titled "Rare Krypton Calendar" and features a photo of a calendar.

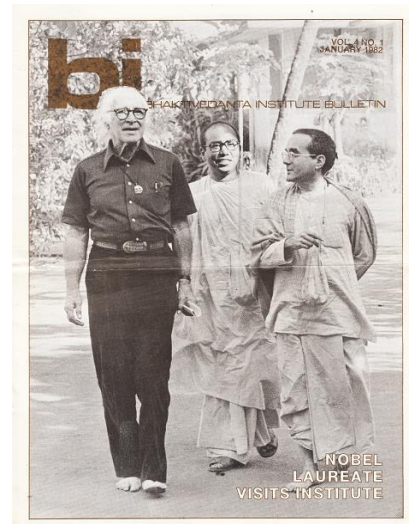
The Bhaktivedanta Institute's base in India was starting to be established in the Mumbai temple complex at Juhu Beach around June 1977, and Sripad Puri Maharaja was given the service of being the Regional Director of the BI at this new location. After the Vrindavan conference, Sripad Puri Maharaja returned to his services in Juhu. On November 26, 1978, Sripad Puri Maharaja participated in the Bose Institute Diamond Jubilee Symposium On Life, Matter, and Molecules. The details of Sripad Puri Maharaja's address were documented in the Back To Godhead article from Feb-Mar 1979 (Vol. 14 No. 2/3) "ISKCON Scientist Blasts Evolution Theory." He also contributed the article "Saint and Revolutionary" to the *Perspectives on Bhaktivedanta Institute*

publication which was shared with the devotees at the 1979 Mayapur festival, for the purpose of spreading awareness of the BI amongst the devotee community. In June 1979, Swarupa Damodara Maharaja, Sripad Puri Maharaja, and Jnana das Prabhu attended the 11th International Congress of Parapsychology and First World Congress of Science and Religion in Rome, Italy. After the conferences, they embarked on a speaking tour of Europe. These activities are reported in the “Bhaktivedanta Institute Temple Newsletter No. 1, Vol. 1” published in May 1979. These historic BI documents have been digitally preserved on the Richard L. Thompson Archives website.



The detailed events of the Parapsychology and Congress of Science and Religion conferences in Rome can be found in the Bhaktivedanta Bulletin issue from May 1980 posted at the Princeton Bhakti Vedanta Institute’s website. George Wald had joined the devotees to attend these conferences, and accompanied them to the Radha Krishna Mandir in Rome during July 1979. A transcript of the dialogue

between George Wald, Sripad Puri Maharaja, and Swarupa Damodar, is also included in the BI Bulletin from May 1980. The detailed activities of Sripad Puri Maharaja and the Juhu BI can be seen in the BI Bulletin series which Sripad Puri Maharaja produced from May 1980 through January 1982. In December 1981, George Wald came to visit the Juhu BI before attending the International Seminar on the Living State at the All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS) in New Delhi. This seminar, held from December 13-19 in 1981, was attended by distinguished scientists and philosophers from all over the world. The Times of India printed the headline, “Nobel Laureate Debunks Theory of Evolution,” and reported, “Nobel Laureate, Prof. Ilya Prigogine, claimed Darwin’s theory of Evolution was no longer valid.” Sripad Puri Maharaja, Swarupa Damodara, and Visuddha Sattva Prabhu also attended this symposium in Delhi, where Swarupa Damodar presented a lecture on “Life from Life.” Further details of this event are included in the BI Bulletin from January 1982.



During this time in the early 1980’s, members of the Bhaktivedanta Institute had been receiving siksha from Srila Bhakti Rakshak Sridhara Dev-goswami Maharaja. Sripad Puri Maharaja, Swarupa Damodara Maharaja, and Dayadhara Prabhu would often seek Srila Sridhara Maharaja’s guidance regarding how to better preach to the scientists. A portion of these dialogues has been published in the book *Subjective Evolution of Consciousness*, which is freely accessible online. Sripad Puri Maharaja went on to receive tridandi sannyasa initiation from Srila Sridhara Maharaja, and stayed with him at the Sri Chaitanya Saraswat Math’s main temple in Navadwip Dham until

1986. During this time, Sripad Puri Maharaja learned more about the Vedic conception of the subjective evolution of consciousness, which Srila Sridhara Maharaja explained is concisely given in Sri Sanatan Goswami's *Brihad Bhagavatamrta*, which provided a clear alternative to Darwin's theory of the objective evolution of bodies. Srila Sridhara Maharaja also exposed Sripad Puri Maharaja to the German philosopher G.W.F. Hegel, whose systematic philosophy gives the details of this subjective evolution, and arrives at the same dialectic conclusion concerning the true nature of reality as Gaudiya siddhanta.



Actually, it was Srila Sridhara Maharaja who originally requested that Srila Prabhupada make a Planetarium which depicts the subjective evolution of consciousness from *Brihad Bhagavatamrta*, represented in the successive rising to higher and higher planets in the material and then finally the spiritual sky. During a talk with Western devotees in 1979, Srila Sridhara Maharaja explained:

“[...] That is service, leading towards centre. And that's Vaikuntha. Just in the lowest position there's Sivaloka, then Vaikuntha, then Ayodhya, then Dvaraka, then Mathura, then Vrndavana, then Govardhana, then Radha-kunda. In this way it has been described according to tattva, ontological conception, the hierarchy has been depicted there in *Brhad Bhagavatamrta*.

I had a mind that I shall build a temple here of that type, but a huge expense. So when I heard that he [Srila Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada] will have the biggest temple in the world there I gave suggestion to your Divine Master, 'You do.' 'Yes.' When I, such site will come, they will have a conception of what is what, what is good. That Krsna is the highest and He has come down in prapanca to give darsana to the people.”

There have been other documented occasions when Srila Prabhupada would discuss the scientific preaching with Srila Sridhara Maharaja, such as on June 27, 1973 when Prabhupada visited Sri Chaitanya Saraswat Math in Navadwip Dham:

“Śrīdhara Mahārāja: And the scientific fineness, that is also in the jurisdiction of matter. But a more subtle and subtler knowledge is possible.

Prabhupāda: Now we are presenting through two of my scientific students, Doctor of Chemistry, that matter is..., the source of matter is spirit. This is our theory. Generally they believe the life, life comes from matter.

Śrīdhara Mahārāja: Life comes from matter.

Prabhupāda: Matter. But we, we are presenting, ‘No, matter comes from life.’

Śrīdhara Mahārāja: Apparently. This is more appropriate. This is Vedānta. Vedānta...

Prabhupāda: *Janmādyasya yataḥ.*

Śrīdhara Mahārāja: Ah!”

After living in India for 10 years, Sripad Puri Maharaja briefly lived in Nepal before returning to his home state of New Jersey, USA. When he first returned, Sripad Puri Maharaja was trying to find a means for income in order to establish a preaching center in New Jersey. While continuing to make these attempts, Sripad Puri Maharaja started his preaching work on the internet using the Commodore 64 computer. By 1997, he had created one of the first educational resource websites of G.W.F. Hegel, with the help of other serious Hegelian scholars. This was www.gwfhegel.org. Through this website and Yahoo groups, Sripad Puri Maharaja was actively engaged in online preaching, while continuing to actively learn himself, for a number of years. On February 5, 1999, Sripad Puri Maharaja inaugurated the Sacred Cybertemple of the Beautiful Goldenlord Sri Sri Guru Gaurasundar Gandharvika Govindaji, at www.mahaprabhu.net, on the 125th anniversary of the holy appearance of Srila Bhaktisiddhanta Saraswati Prabhupada. This was also the 28th anniversary of the Bhaktivedanta Institute.

Sometime in 2005, Sripad Puri Maharaja received a personal visit in New Jersey from Bhaktiswarupa Damodara Maharaja, along with some of his Manipur troupe. This was truly Krishna’s causeless mercy. One year later on October 2, 2006, Swarupa Damodara Maharaja unexpectedly passed from this world. Due to this circumstance, Sripad Puri Maharaja called Sadaputa Prabhu and Rupanuga Prabhu after over 25 years without contact.



After Sripada Bhaktiswarupa Damodara Maharaja’s departure, Sripad Puri Maharaja created the website www.bhaktiswarupadamodara.com in honor of Sripada Maharaja’s lifetime of tireless ecstatic service to Sri Guru and Sri Gauranga. Soon after these events, Sripad Puri Maharaja was contacted by some of Swarupa Damodara Maharaja’s disciples, particularly Purshottama



Jagannatha Das and Sushen Krishna Das. Purshottama Jagannatha Prabhu had received his Ph. D. in Chemical Engineering from the Indian Institute of Technology (IIT) Kharagpur, and had been serving Swarupa Damodara Maharaja in various ways since 2000. Sushen Krishna Prabhu obtained a Ph. D. in Coastal Hydrodynamics from IIT Kharagpur, in 2008. During this time, in 2005, Sushen Krishna Prabhu encountered

Swarupa Damodara Maharaja and became engaged in scientific sankirtan service. After Swarupa Damodara Maharaja's disappearance, they both sought shelter from Sripad Puri Maharaja due to what they had heard about him from their Gurudeva. Through an expansion of Sripad Puri Maharaja's online preaching platforms, such as regular Skype classes discussing shastra with the devotees, Purshottama Jagannatha Das (pictured above), Sushen Krishna Das (pictured below, to the right), and others, began to receive spiritual nourishment from Sripad Puri Maharaja. The audio recordings of these classes are publicly available on the *Satsanga* blog at (www.mahaprabhu.net/satsanga/), along with other content. Two issues of the *Science and Scientist* newsletter from 2007 and 2008, which were a collaborative effort from multiple disciples of Swarupa Damodara Maharaja, are available on www.scienceandscientist.org/harmonizer. Starting in December 2009, a more concentrated effort was made for the monthly publication of *The Harmonizer* newsletter, available at the same website. This newsletter includes short articles from our Gaudiya Vaishnava Acharyas, as well as from devotees actively engaged in the scientific sankirtan.



Purshottama Jagannatha Prabhu and Sushen Krishna Prabhu were very inspired by Sripad Puri Maharaja's guidance and they became fully devoted to his preaching mission. In 2008, Sushen Krishna Prabhu (who would become Srila B. N. Shanta Maharaja) created the Sadhu-Sanga Google Group for the sake of discussing the synthesis of science, philosophy, and religion, and the role of consciousness in modern science, in general, as well as to specifically discuss the conception that Life and Matter come from Life, and that the subjective evolution of consciousness has more comprehensive explanatory power than Darwin's theory of the objective evolution of bodies. The Sadhu-Sanga Google Group became a platform where a very large number of international scholars and scientists, including well known individuals such as Deepak Chopra, Menas Kafatos, Stuart Hameroff, and Bernardo Kastrup, became actively engaged in discussion with the Bhakti Vedanta Institute, as well as with each other. In 2009, the devotees created the *Darwin Under Siege* blog at www.scienceandscientist.org/Darwin/.



By 2012, both Purshottama Jagannatha Prabhu and Sushen Krishna Prabhu received tridandi sannyasa initiation from the Sevaite-President-Acharya of Sri Chaitanya Saraswat Math, Srila Bhakti Nirmal Acharya Dev-goswami Maharaja (right). Purshottama Jagannatha Prabhu became Bhakti Vijnana Muni Maharaja (left), and Sushen Krishna Prabhu became Bhakti Niskama Shanta Maharaja (middle).

Since 2008, Muni Maharaja and Shanta Maharaja had been living at Sri Chaitanya Saraswat Math's main temple in Navadwip Dham, where Sripad Puri Maharaja had lived in the 1980's. Their present service to Sripad Puri Maharaja had been 100% guided and conducted through online exchanges. Not only were Muni Maharaja and Shanta Maharaja engaged in the online preaching, but they also traveled throughout villages and universities in India, as well as internationally, to share what they had learned from our Guru-varga.

Also, in 2012 Sripad Bhakti Madhava Puri Maharaja was finally able to open the long anticipated preaching center in Princeton, New Jersey. The Bhakti Vedanta Institute of Spiritual Culture and Science (BVISCS) was established at 20 Nassau Street, Suite 116, which was right across the street from Princeton University. The auspicious day on which the lease was signed for suite 116 was the same day as Srila Prabhupada's 116th appearance anniversary. During the eight years which this office served as the base for the Princeton Bhakti Vedanta Institute, many individuals such as local people, students, the diverse NJ bhakti yoga community, devotees from out of state, a UN representative for the United Religions Initiative, and many others, came to hear what Sripad Puri Maharaja was sharing.

In 2013, the annual international conference series Science and Scientist was inaugurated by Srila Bhakti Niskama Shanta Maharaja. The underlying question of this presently ongoing conference series is: the Scientist can explain Science, but can Science explain the Scientist? From 2013-2018, the conference had been held throughout India and Nepal. Dr. S. R. Bhatt, who spoke on the philosophical foundations of life at the 1977 Life comes from Life conference in Vrindavan, has been an active participant in the conference series to this very day. In 2018, after 10 years of only communicating with each other virtually, Muni Maharaja and Shanta Maharaja came to personally visit with Sripad Puri Maharaja. After a short stay in 2018, they came back in 2019 for a six month visit. During this time, the Science and Scientist conference was held at Rutgers University's Busch Student Center in New Jersey, USA. In 2020 and 2021, we had to



adapt to an online format via Zoom, due to the Coronavirus. All details of past conferences can be found at www.scienceandscientist.org.



In November 2018, through the diverse NJ bhakti yoga community, Christopher Rolke came to the Princeton Bhakti Vedanta Institute during one of the weekly Saturday programs. After taking advantage of several opportunities for association with and service to Sripad Bhakti Madhava Puri Maharaja, Christopher was offered the opportunity for full time service as Sripad Puri Maharaja's assistant. In January 2019, he received harinam diksha initiation from Srila Bhakti Nirmal Acharya Maharaja, along with the name Krishna Keshava Das.

In 2020, the Princeton BVISCS published the book *Idols of the Mind vs. True Reality*, by Sripad Puri Maharaja. This book is available worldwide through Amazon. Since its publication, several reviews have been written, all of which have been published in the Princeton BVISCS's quarterly newsletter ŚRĪ MAHĀNET, which has been published since the beginning of the millennium. These are all available via the *Satsanga* blog (www.mahaprabhu.net/satsanga/). One of the book reviews was also published in the Scientific & Medical Network's journal, *Paradigm Explorer*. In 2021, the Princeton BVISCS also launched the Circles of Life educational community initiative, which coordinates groups at the local level, within universities and among global communities, to engage productive dialogue concerned with seriously considering the idea that Life and Matter come from Life and the development of the subjective evolution of consciousness (www.bviscs.org/circles-of-life/). The first group to participate in this initiative was the Stockton University Science of Life Club. Current projects of the Princeton BVISCS include attempting to establish another club at Georgetown University, completing the book *The Science of Life* - which is a synthesis of everything Sripad Puri Maharaja has presented at various conferences and through various blogs and articles, and primarily the valuable insights he offered to the Sadhu-Sanga Google Group, as well as continuing our community programs - online Sadhu-sanga every Saturday from 1:00-3:00 Eastern time, and monthly kirtan and prasadam distribution at the Princeton YMCA.

www.bviscs.org // linktr.ee/bviscs