

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

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Prabhus Rasaraja das on kartals and Syamasundara das on guitar opened Harinam Sankirtan at the Bhakti Vedanta Institute (BVI) office with Sripad Bhakti Madhava Puri Maharaj, Ph.D. (Sripad Puri Maharaj), Srngara Mataji and Nitai das Prabhu. After several requests, Srngara Mataji proved to be the braver one to lead one of the kirtans, while I remained shyly behind the camera.

In an informal session before the regular lecture began Sripad Puri Maharaj was saying to one of the guests, "Radha-Krishna is the exchange of Love and to be blessed with that love is the goal or *prayojana* of Krishna consciousness." In the *Srimad Bhagavad-gītā* (18.20) it states that 'those that are in the mode of goodness see one spirit in all the innumerable forms of life.'"

*sarva-bhūteṣu yenaikaṁ  
bhāvam avyayam īkṣate  
avibhaktaṁ vibhakteṣu  
taj jñānaṁ viddhi sāttvikam*

"That knowledge by which the one imperishable and undivided principle {My superior divine potency} is seen to be present in all the diverse living beings is to be known as knowledge of the nature of goodness."

"When devotees are fully dedicated in loving service to the Lord, their vision changes. Such devotees see *achintya guna svarup*, forms that would be of inconceivable nature to the ordinary unloving eyes," Sripad Puri Maharaj said. "Mahaprabhu's mind was so eager to see Krishna that He could see nothing else because in comparison nothing else was worth seeing. Thus he prayed

*yugāyitaṁ nimeṣeṇa  
cakṣuṣā prāvṛṣāyitam  
śūnyāyitaṁ jagat sarvaṁ  
govindaviraheṇa me*

"In separation from Govinda a moment seems like a yuga, incessant tears over flood my eyes, and the whole world seems vacant in your absence."

When we see something, we are paying attention to what we are interested in. In the same way, we have to pay attention in order to properly hear something. By switching your attention, you will see things differently. If our attention and affection were captured by Krishna's service then we would not be able to focus on anything else. That development is the gradual progression of *bhakti-yoga* or Krishna Consciousness." *Śrī Caitanya Caritāmṛta Madhya* 22.134 confirms this:

*'eka' aṅga sādhe, keha sādhe 'bahu' aṅga  
'niṣṭhā' haile upajaya premera taraṅga*

"When one is firmly fixed in devotional service, whether he executes one or many processes of devotional service, the waves of love of Godhead will awaken."

"And how do we get to this stage of seeing things only in relation to Krishna?" Sripad Puri Maharaj asked then responded, "We have to have *śraddha* (faith) and *sadhu-sanga* (association with devotees), then comes *bhajana-kriya*, engagement in devotional activities. *Anartha nivr̥tti* is freeing ourselves from all the other non-devotional nature on which we may focus our attention. In the next stage, *nistha*, we become fixed in that which our attention is most desiring, Krishna consciousness. Next is *ruci*, where taste comes and then *bhava* or ecstasy," Sripad Puri Maharaj explained. "We cannot have *ruci* without first becoming fixed. If our mind has taste for other things then it will keep wandering towards those things, but as soon as we get a taste for Krishna, then the mind will not wander. That taste is called *ruci*. Fixation and taste go together. We cannot have fixation on Krishna unless we have that taste for Krishna, otherwise *nishta* or focus will be for whatever you have that *ruci* for."

Where does taste, *ruci*, come from? Sripad Puri Maharaj asked his attentive audience flocked to his lotus feet. In response, he said, "From a *bhakta* (devotee). Because we are filled with so many other acquired tastes, it's only when we come in touch with a genuine *bhakta* that we may realize that there's another taste we have never thought of or experienced before. Taste comes from the bhaktas. They are very important to us. We can only get bhakti (devotion) from one who has it, a bhakta."



**Listening attentively at the shelter of Sripad Puri Maharaj's lotus feet.**

After a brief pause, Sripad Puri Maharaj continued, "So that first glimmer is called the *bhakti lata bija* (*lata* means the creeper of bhakti, *bija* means seed). That *bija* or conception is planted in our heart by a bhakta, who received it from another bhakta and so on so forth. We cannot get bhakti (devotion) from anywhere, it has to come from a bhakta." "It's a heart transaction like Srila Guru Maharaj said," Rasaraja das Prabhu interjected. "Yes, it's a feeling that we get by meeting the pure devotee that is transferred to us. It's that love, affection, attachment to Krishna seva that gets transferred to another devotee. And of course, that seed once it is planted, must be cultivated and protected," Sripad Puri Maharaj continued. "We have to be very careful in the process of developing the creeper of devotion and weeding out impurities that may come to stunt its growth. It's a very delicate process to cultivate the heart, but by service under the guidance of guru, hearing the words of sastra and devotees, and chanting the Holy Names of Krishna with the conception we've got from guru helps us to cultivate the proper feeling and taste in our heart. As that taste grows more and more our heart becomes less and less interested in other mundane tastes. When you find something tasty, you want to share it with others also. Even unintentionally you are distributing it to others just by the joy you are experiencing from that taste. It pours out into the environment, and that is Mahaprabhu! He's experiencing the ecstasy of chanting the Holy Names and He is distributing it freely to everyone to relish."

"Cultivating the seed, is that part of devotional service?" Srngara mataji asked? "Yes, that is bhakti yoga, devotional service," Sripad

Puri Maharaj responded. “*Raga* bhakti (spontaneous devotion) is higher than *sadhana* bhakti (dutiful practice of devotion), but that will develop in due course.”

After a brief pause, he said, “We are really at the mercy of Krishna because there are so many things that can come to distract us. How many ways we have become fallen or misled. When we think of those things that can drag us away, we realize how much we are at the mercy of the Lord. It’s a very good thing to recognize how many ways we are not a devotee. The highest devotee actually thinks he’s not a devotee. It’s hard to understand but if we know what is actual surrender and devotion, we will recognize how many things are not devotional,” Sripad Puri Maharaj continued. “We have to constantly be on alert bringing our mind back and trying to see how Krishna is working in everything. Srila Sridhar Maharaj would say that ‘the environment will appear to be affectionate to us when we come to that level of Krishna Consciousness. Everything will be guiding us towards Krishna.’”

“Does the time or the location matter when we offer food to Krishna and will He accept it?” Sobha Mandava asked. “It does not depend on time or place, or even what we offer. In the *Gita* Krishna mentions that even a leaf, flower, fruit or water can be offered and He will accept it when offered with love. Whatever we offer with devotion, even if it is only one grain of rice, it will be enough to purify our whole being if it was accepted by Krishna,” Sripad Puri Maharaj responded. After a brief pause he continued, “If even for one moment we surrender, Krishna will not forget such a devotee. Once He has taken his position in our heart, our whole heart will ultimately be purified.”

At this point, Sripad Puri Maharaj began the regular lecture, reading from Srila Sridhar Maharaja’s *Bhagavad Gita – Hidden Treasure of the Sweet Absolute*, Chapter 8, verses 11 – 13

*yad akṣaram veda-vido vadanti  
viśanti yad yatayo vīta-rāgāḥ  
yad icchanto brahma-caryam caranti  
tat te padam saṅgrahaṇa pravakṣye[11]*

*sarva-dvārāṇi samyamya  
mano hṛdi nirudhya ca  
mūrdhny ādhāyātmanaḥ prāṇam  
āsthito yoga-dhāraṇām[12]*

*om ity ekākṣaram brahma  
vyāharan mām anusmaran  
yaḥ prayāti tyajan dehaṁ  
sa yāti paramām gatim[13]*

“Along with the method of attaining it, I shall describe to you that objective which the learned knowers of the *Vedas* call Om, the Imperishable, within which the desire less ascetics enter, and which the devout seekers aspire to reach by practicing the vow of celibacy. Controlling all the gateways of the senses, holding the mind steady within the heart, establishing the life-force between the eyebrows and fully absorbing the thoughts in the spiritual self, one who at the time of leaving the body vibrates the monosyllable Om and departs the world in consciousness of Me, reaches the transcendental world.”

Here, “the method of attaining it,” which Krishna refers to in this verse, is the effulgence of the Supreme Person, Sri Krishna Himself. So how to attain that effulgence of the Supreme Person is described in these verses. One must negate all sense desire, negate any movement of the mind, and negate any attention to things other than the spiritual self. This explains the negative approach, *nivritti marg*. There are two paths: *nivritti marg* (path of renunciation) and *pravritti marg* is the path of positive engagement,” Sripad Puri Maharaj continued.

“*Om* or AUM is the Absolute Truth. The three letters of the word represent Sri Krishna, Srimati Radharani and Their Servitors, yet it is pronounced as one word,” Sripad Puri Maharaj explained. “Otherwise as a mere sound vibration it is impersonal, whereas, the inner meaning of AUM is the Personality of Godhead, Sri Krishna. Those who want to eliminate all the differentiated experiences of the material platform practice impersonal meditation to nullify everything in their experience. Renunciation means to give up everything, so you will find them practicing this kind of impersonal meditation by repeating the word Om. They just practice meditation on the sound vibration without understanding anything more than that. In this way, they become absorbed in that and detach themselves from everything else,” Sripad Puri Maharaj continued. “Renunciation is a middle state. It is merely getting rid of the negative plane of exploitation, but has not yet entered the positive plane of dedication. Those who reach that state eventually stay in the middle plane of liberation. Liberation means freedom from the exploitative platform, but from the neutral position one wants to go to the devotional platform which is transcendental to the material plane of consciousness.”

Revant asked, "Maharaj, it is necessary for *nivrtti marg* to be done as well, right?"

"Not necessarily because by simply engaging your senses positively in *seva* you are automatically practicing *nivrtti marg*," Sripad Puri Maharaj responded. "For example you have to eat, so by saying 'I'm going to fast as much as possible, this way my tongue does not become attracted to tasting food' that's *nivrtti marg*. But if you think I'm going to gather all food and offer it to Krishna and then honor it as His *prasad*, that becomes *pravritti marg*. In this way we negate our self-interested life by cultivating our Krishna centered life. This is possible only if we have surrendered to Guru."

"I think *pravritti marg* is much more difficult than *nivrtti marg* because it is so easy to fool yourself," Revant said.

"You may not know Krishna's trick. By offering food to Him and then honoring it, we will automatically be purified of the other negative attachments. We will get a higher taste. Krishna will take away all our other desires without our consciously knowing it. That's the real power of Krishna *prasadam* (sanctified food)," Sripad Puri Maharaj explained. "Krishna and His *shakti* or potencies are of the same transcendental quality. This is the nature of the absolute and anyone who makes a single, minute connection with Him in any way, his whole being will become purified. Of course, we have to be sincere, and by faithfully acting under the watchful eye of our spiritual guardian, and following the instructions of *sastra* and *sadhu* we can make proper progress."

"In these verses it also mentions ascetic meditation on the Name, Om and on the sound, 'which the devout seekers aspire to reach by practicing the vow of celibacy.' Celibacy means control of the sex impulse. Such renunciation is a great austerity especially in this modern world because the main attachment to the material platform of exploitation is sex attraction -- *maithunya agare* (the shackles of sex life)," Sripad Puri Maharaj continued. "Sex attraction is what is holding people in bondage to the material world, because whatever endeavors you make to become rich, famous, learned, or whatever it is that you are aspiring for, the ultimate motive is to be attractive to the opposite sex, and have a nice house, children, and so on." At this comment both Revant and Sobha disagreed.

"This is hard for me to accept...maybe I need to think about it more," Revant said. "We are created out of sex activity. Thus everything in

this world is coming from that sexual relation,” Sripad Puri Maharaj affirmed. “Not just any kind of desire, right?” Revant asked. “Of all those pleasures in this world, sex is the most fundamental and alluring,” Sripad Puri Maharaj reaffirmed. “I thought it was money, power and all these things,” Ms. Mandava said. “It’s the root of all of those other desires” Sripad Puri Maharaj replied. In the *Srimad Bhagavad-gītā* 3.39, Sri Krishna confirms this:

*avrtam jnanam etena  
jnanino nitya-vairina  
kama-rupena kaunteya  
duspurenanalena ca*

“Thus, a man's pure consciousness is covered by his eternal enemy in the form of lust, which is never satisfied and which burns like fire.”

In the same purport, Srila Prabhupada writes, “It is said in the *Manu-smṛti* that lust cannot be satisfied by any amount of sense enjoyment, just as fire is never extinguished by a constant supply of fuel. In the material world, the center of all activities is sex, and thus this material world is called *maithunya-agara*, or the shackles of sex life.... Therefore, this lust is the symbol of ignorance by which the living entity is kept within the material world.”

“For one who can practice celibacy it’s a great austerity and from that practice, one can achieve the Impersonal Absolute. Of courses, ultimately sex is not sinful or wrong. In the spiritual world there is also sex but it is not based on *kama* or mundane lust, it is based on *prema* (transcendental love). *Prema* and *kama* are not the same,” Sripad Puri Maharaj continued. “Gold and lead are both metals, but they have very different qualities and values. Without Krishna consciousness, everything is a sin, because it leads us far from our highest fulfillment in life.”

Coming full circle back to *nivṛtti marg* and *pravṛtti marg*, Sripad Puri Maharaj said they are two different paths. “They don’t lead to the same goal but they can ultimately. *Nivṛtti marg* will lead to liberation and from there one can try to take up *pravṛtti marg*. In *bhakti yoga* we get the benefit of both. It’s a very subtle thing,” Sripad Puri Maharaj continued. “We are interested in development of Krishna consciousness, not just following some process for a result in relation to this world – positive or negative. There are some basic changes that occur within the heart for those whose aim is transcendental.”

The *Gita* verse twelve of chapter eight mentions "controlling all the gateways of the senses." To further explain this verse, Sripad Puri Maharaj said, "The soul apprehends the material world through the mind and senses. The body doesn't sense anything. If you have a dead body, all the sense organs are there but it doesn't sense anything. You can kick it, cut it into pieces, it won't feel or react to anything. The soul is the thing that is feeling through the body, through the senses. Thus the senses are called the gateways of the soul and the chief of the senses is the mind. So without the mind we cannot understand what the sense impressions signify. The mind is the seat of the senses. By keeping the mind steady, by controlling the mind, we can thereby control the senses, despite all the impressions that are coming from them -- that's what the real yogis practice," Sripad Puri Maharaj continued. "If you can understand how the mind and senses are working together, then you can control the mind and ultimately control the senses." After a brief pause, he said "What comes next is the stage of establishing the life air between the eyes. That is the area called the third eye. What is the life air?" Sripad Puri Maharaj asked then responded, "Life air means *prana* (the breath). The yogi has to practice focus on that breath between the eyes, where the inner and outer breath meet. By controlling the breath one can minimize all bodily functions and still maintain his life with that kind of meditation or *pranayama*. And then further searching the source of that life air one comes up to the top of the head or *brahma randhra*," Sripad Puri Maharaj continued. "There the life force has its source and its connection to the higher spiritual world beyond it"

"Even those yogis who achieve impersonal realization have to come down again because there is nothing for them to do. Only those who develop devotion to Krishna, can remain permanently fixed beyond material entanglement because they have some engagement in transcendental activities that are of higher nature," Sripad Puri Maharaj said. "The living entity by nature is active. To be alive is to be active. So it's not possible to remain inactive or impersonal."

Revant said, "I think *bhakti yoga* is more difficult than *pranayama*." In response, Sripad Puri Maharaj said, "What is recommended for this age of Kali (darkness, ignorance and quarrelling) is *sankirtan*, chanting the Holy Names of the Lord in the association of the devotees." "In the end, the process is to develop love of God" Rasaraj das Prabhu said.



**Prasadam was served and honored by all.**

Harinam Sankirtana ki jai

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

Your humble servant  
Kushum devi dasi  
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